

“Talking About Race Just Makes Everyone Uncomfortable”

Why We Need to Discuss Race in the United States

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In spite of our hesitance to seriously discuss them, racial myths permeate our social world. They are frequently present in the mass media and public discourse, as well as in our everyday conversations with each other. Perhaps in your dorm rooms, dining halls, workplaces, or on social media, you have heard variations on the following statements:

- We elected a Black president twice, which means racism doesn't exist anymore.
- We need to look out for “real Americans” first, not immigrants.
- Native American/Indian, Asian/Oriental, Latino/Hispanic—why does it matter what we call them?
- Asian Americans are doing very well. If other racial groups had similar values, they would do well also.
- I know a minority who got worse scores than me and got into a better college!
- When people come here, they should learn the language.
- Taking down Confederate statues just erases history.

These kinds of statements reflect a great deal of the conventional wisdom around race. We define *conventional wisdom* as the received body of knowledge informally shared by a group or society that is often unstated, internally inconsistent, and resistant to change. This conventional wisdom is full of racial myths and misunderstandings. In this reader, we look at common racial and ethnic myths that we and many sociology professors and race scholars have heard from students in race courses. In this essay, we will give you some of the tools necessary to use this reader and introduce some key ideas and questions to help you navigate discussions about race and ethnicity both inside and outside the classroom.

Early in our schooling, we learn a simplified history of the founding of the United States that ignores the significant levels of racial conflict and

inequality that have existed. For instance, we are taught that the United States was founded on ideals of freedom and equality for all; this narrative ignores the many groups who were excluded from that freedom and equality—namely, Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color (BIPOC). As Blauner (2001) reminds us, “along with settlers and immigrants there have always been conquered Indians and black slaves, and later defeated Mexicans—that is, colonial subjects—on the national soil. Such a reminder is not pleasant to a society that represses those aspects of its history that do not fit the collective self-image of a democracy of all men” (p. 46). We also tend to think that racial or ethnic strife happened sometime *after* that idealized founding. However, as sociologist Joe Feagin (2020) notes in his book *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing*, “racial oppression was not added later on in the development of this society, but was the foundation of the original colonial and U.S. social systems, and it still remains as a U.S. foundation” (pp. 2–3). Yet there is a tendency in U.S. society to gloss over this history or in other ways minimize the import of race and ethnicity.

When President Barack Obama was elected in 2008, we began to hear that perhaps we had moved beyond race and that we were “post-racial,” despite much evidence to the contrary. To be sure, the election of the nation’s first Black president signaled a significant shift in the tenor of race relations in the United States, but not always for the positive. It is clear in the years since 2008, that the election of President Obama was something of a miner’s canary, signaling that perhaps we hadn’t come as far on the issue of race as we would like to think. Unique occurrences during his presidency, such as the “birtherism” movement, which many mark as the beginning of former President Donald Trump’s political career, or his being called a liar by a congressman during a televised congressional address, suggested early on that we were far from post-racial. The reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in modern political discourse and the power of the White nationalist movement in the form of the “alt-right” (including groups like the Proud Boys and the Boogaloo Boys/Bois) in the United States (and abroad), culminating in the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, reaffirm evidence that a “post-racial” diagnosis was premature.

The discourse around post-racialism and an emphasis on color blindness are what Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) have referred to as *racial projects*. They are “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (p. 56). U.S. history is replete with racial projects that have resulted in negative outcomes for people of color. The defining of Native Americans as *savages* that coincided with the violent removal of groups from their land; the current dehumanizing construct of Latinx people (and Mexican Americans, specifically) as “illegal immigrants,” thus prompting calls for stringent legislation and policy and even the caging of children; and the branding of Black women as *welfare queens* undeserving of public assistance are all examples of racial projects and policies that have disenfranchised BIPOC groups. More recently, we have seen the racialization of Muslims as a racial project designed to mark Muslims as threatening (see Bayoumi in this volume); decades of this framing led to Trump’s “Muslim Ban” where shortly after he took office, people from countries with large

numbers of Muslim people weren't allowed to travel to the United States. As sociologist Ted Thornhill explains in greater detail in his essay, the post-racial/color-blind discourse also seems to be a racial project designed to convince people in the United States that thinking or talking about the reality of race as it plays out in their day-to-day lives is itself a problem and that we can solve these problems just by pretending they don't exist.

That is, although empirical information about unequal outcomes in education, the criminal justice system, health, and the labor market clearly indicates how our lives are affected by race and ethnicity, when people even mention these topics, they are often subject to silencing and even ridicule. You may have heard the statement, "Why can't people just stop talking about race? If they stopped talking about it, it would go away!" Perhaps you've even said it yourself. As difficult as it is to talk about, our ability to move toward greater social justice is severely limited by the silencing around race. Moreover, as Thornhill explains in his essay in this book, "differences in skin color are not the problem; racism, racial discrimination, White racial privilege, and racial inequality are." Silence only begets further misunderstanding and inhibits progress.

To get the discussion started, let's talk about the role race plays in the college experience and why you might be hearing more about race than you have at other points in your life.

The Impact of the College Experience on Racial Thinking and Experiences

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As Stephanie McClure (one of the editors of this volume) points out in her essay with Kailah Jeffries on campus organizations, the college experience has the potential to bring about a great deal of intellectual and personal growth and is an opportunity for students to obtain a degree while also learning more about who they are as individuals and who they would like to become (see also Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Sociologist Mary C. Waters (2013) writes that the college experience also often puts race in stark relief, where students find themselves thinking about race more than they did when they were younger:

Sociologists and psychologists note that at the time people leave home and begin to live independently from their parents . . . they report a heightened sense of racial and ethnic identity as they sort through how much of their beliefs and behaviors are idiosyncratic to their families and how much are shared with other people. It is not until one comes into close contact with many people who are different from oneself that individuals realize the ways in which their backgrounds may influence their individual personality. (p. 212; see also Aries, 2008; Tatum, 2017)

The effect of this experience may be even greater if a student has had very limited previous exposure to people of different races or ethnicities, which is often the case given the segregation that happens in our nation's

schools (Orfield et al., 2016). Moreover, as Waters (2013) argues, prior to the college experience, many White students' relationship to their ethnicity is mostly symbolic, meaning that it is a voluntary relationship that is often enjoyable and expressed only intermittently (see also Gans, 1979). For instance, they may celebrate their distant Irish heritage on St. Patrick's Day, but otherwise rarely acknowledge it. Thus, their relationship to their race or ethnicity is fairly tenuous.

But "for all of the ways in which ethnicity [and race] does not matter for White Americans, it does matter for non-Whites" (Waters, 2013, p. 210). For students of color, and particularly those at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), race and ethnicity play a key role in their college experience. For example, in Elizabeth Aries's (2008, p. 36) study of race and class at an elite college, she found that race was something that almost every Black student in the study had thought about before arriving, while only half of the White students in the study had (see also Tatum, 2017). In addition, many of the White students in her study seemed unaware of the privileges they possessed as a result of their race. One of those privileges is that college campuses are essentially built around White students' interests and needs; the food served in the dining halls, the membership and leadership of student organizations, the music played in dorm rooms and at campus parties, and even the course offerings at the college frequently center on the desires and interests of White students (see also Feagin & Sikes, 1995). In other words, the overall culture of the institution frequently reflects the things that White people value. However, because Whiteness and White privilege is often made invisible (DiAngelo, 2016; McIntosh, 2013; Rothenberg, 2012), it is difficult for some White students to see.

Meanwhile, it is within this context that BIPOC students must function. They may have grown up in cultures with different music, foods, and languages, for example, or have different life histories, experiences, and concerns that they find difficult to have validated in the context of a White-dominated institution. Thus, it is challenging for these students to enjoy the full college experience. As Beverly Daniel Tatum (2017) writes, they also frequently find themselves the target of racial prejudice, discrimination, and isolation on campus and in the classroom:

Whether it is the loneliness of being routinely overlooked as a lab partner in science courses, the irritation of being continually asked by curious classmates about Black hairstyles, the discomfort of being singled out by a professor to give the "Black perspective" in class discussion, the pain of racist graffiti scrawled on dormitory room doors, the insult of racist jokes circulated through campus e-mail, or the injury inflicted by racial epithets (and sometimes beer bottles) hurled from a passing car, Black students [and other students of color] on predominantly White campuses must cope with ongoing affronts to their racial identity. (p. 168; see also Feagin, 2020; Feagin & Sikes, 1994)

The continued occurrence of racist theme parties on college campuses, including ghetto themes, "illegals" themes, and students in Blackface, bear out the nature of this hostility (Fausset & Robertson, 2019). For example, in

2012, a White fraternity at a prestigious university allegedly held an Asian-themed party, complete with conical hats, geisha outfits, and misspellings on the invitation designed to convey an Asian accent (Quan, 2013; see also Kingkade, 2013; Wade, 2015).

As a result of these hostilities, Black, Asian, Latinx, Middle Eastern, and Native American students may find solace in hanging out with other students who belong to their racial or ethnic group. They may even join a racial or ethnic affinity group such as an Asian Student Union, a MeChA group (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlán) representing Chicana students, or a Black Greek-letter organization (BGLO) as a way of feeling safe and valued while also feeling connected to the wider campus community. As McClure and Jeffries discuss, this process is known as *social integration* and is not only necessary for identity development but also plays a key role in successful college completion. Yet when White students enter a college campus and see racial affinity groups, they wonder why such things exist, because their race or ethnicity has never been very important in their lives. They may even feel a sense of being left out when they see BIPOC students gathering together (Aries, 2008) or in organizations built around their interests. This is one of the many ways the college experience highlights the salience of race.

Race is also highlighted in college classrooms in a way that it often isn't in high school classrooms. For example, college is frequently the first time students are exposed to a history of the United States that analyzes race and ethnicity in a critical way. This is particularly the case now as local school districts are passing legislation that restricts nearly any mention of race/ethnicity, diversity, equity, or inclusion. As Feagin (2020) says, "Powerful whites and their acolytes have long tried to sanitize the country's collective racial memories and to downplay or eliminate truthful understandings of our extremely racist history" (p. 28). For example, through the lens of White supremacy, the story of contact between Native Americans and European settlers is often told (and represented in films such as Disney's *Pocahontas*) as two communities who struggled to respect each other's differences, rather than as a story of violent conflict and ultimate domination, colonization, and genocide on the part of White settlers. In another example, we are taught that true Black oppression ended with enslavement or with the end of Jim Crow segregation, without looking at the legacy of systemic oppression and the destruction both of these systems left in their wake. In many cases, the college classroom is the first opportunity an individual has to seriously consider the true implications of race and ethnicity, as well as the United States' complicated and painful racial history. This can be a jarring and difficult experience.

Nonetheless, understanding the legacies of our racial history is a key emphasis of this book, for in understanding the history we can disprove many common racial myths and move toward greater social justice. For instance, in her essay, race scholar Paula Ioanide disproves the commonly held myth that the United States is a meritocracy where anyone who works hard enough can get ahead. As Ioanide explains, Blacks and Whites with similar incomes, work histories, and family structures have "radically different relationships to wealth and inheritance," which is largely a function of Black people's difficulty in accumulating wealth under restrictive social structures such as enslavement, Jim Crow, and FHA redlining. Thus, "hard work" isn't enough to overcome disparities that began long ago. The history

of Jim Crow is also connected to persistent educational segregation and inequality, as discussed by Hersheda Patel, Emily Meanwell, and Stephanie McClure in this volume. Knowledge of these historical racial inequities in the U.S. educational system is also necessary for understanding questions of affirmative action in higher education, as you'll read in the essay by OiYan Poon, Nikki Kāhealani Chun, Joanne Song Engler, and Douglas H. Lee and in the labor market, a topic analyzed by Wendy Leo Moore.

Legacies of oppression also affect individual attitudes and interpersonal interactions. For example, when Black men are perceived as inherently criminal, every Black man becomes a suspect, as Sara Buck Doude and Vanessa Rodriguez explain in their essay on bias in perceptions of crime and criminals. Stereotypical thinking and what social psychologists refer to as “ultimate attribution error” contribute to how the same behaviors are perceived very differently depending on the race and ethnicity of the actor, and how that contributes to often deadly interactions individuals have with police, a topic examined by Rashawn Ray and Jasmón Bailey. Legacies of racial oppression don't just impact contemporary realities in the United States, as Nikki Khanna (2020), author of *Whiter: Asian American Women on Skin Color and Colorism*, discusses in her essay on global anti-Blackness. Khanna demonstrates how pervasive and widespread attitudes of White supremacy impact the interactions of individuals and the actions of governments all over the world. In all these ways, legacies of racial struggles resonate decades and even centuries later.

When White students are first exposed to the history of White oppression, some feel guilty or ashamed that the racial group to which they belong has been historically responsible for colonization, domination, and global hegemony. They sometimes become anxious to present themselves as “one of the good ones” and may even say things like, “I'm not racist! Some of my best friends are [Black, Asian, Latinx, Native American, etc.]” In reviewing the evidence from prominent sociologists such as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Joe Feagin, Cherise Harris (coeditor of this volume) points out that often when people claim to have friends of other racial or ethnic backgrounds, their “friendships” lack depth. They may not even know their “friend's” name, or the friendship disintegrates when the activity in which they have participated is over. They may also still harbor racist ideas despite their supposed friendship. While the friends defense is often an attempt by well-meaning Whites to present themselves as racial allies, as Harris points out, being an ally (or accomplice) is a far more complicated process that, among other things, involves taking proactive steps to confront one's own racism and the racist views and actions of other Whites. Through clearer understandings of our racial history and the nature of our racial and ethnic dynamics and interactions, we have a far better chance of moving toward a society with greater social justice. That is one of several goals of this book.

Our Job and Your Job

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Given the United States' varied, complicated, and difficult racial history, it is no great surprise that race is a challenging sociological topic. This is the case

for three important reasons: (1) A good deal of our information about race and ethnicity includes conventional (or “folk”) wisdom that is frequently incorrect; (2) much of that conventional wisdom has been handed down to us by agents of socialization (e.g., parents, extended family, peers, the church, communities, and media) whose opinions tend to weigh heavily on us; and (3) there is an overall culture of silence around race that permeates the United States (see Tatum, 2017), thus prompting little critical analysis of that conventional wisdom. None of these should be underestimated in terms of their overall impact; it is problematic that conventional wisdom tends to reflect a sanitized racial history where our ugliest chapters are reimagined or deleted altogether (Feagin, 2020) yet repeated over and over again as truth in the media and in our everyday conversations. That the conventional wisdom is repeated by our agents of socialization is problematic because our tendency is to uncritically accept what they say in their role as significant others to whom we are closest and who have taught us many other important and meaningful life lessons. It is from them that we get many important cues about race and ethnicity. For example, perhaps there were points in your life when a parent, teacher, or friend suggested it was rude to mention race, let alone discuss it as a serious topic. The cue you might have gotten then is to silence any discussion about race. At other times, perhaps you received messages that minimized or dismissed its significance. If you are from a BIPOC group, the cue you might have gotten is not to mention race or racism for fear that you would be accused of being “angry” or “playing the race card”; perhaps worse, you remain silent because you fear that no one will care about your experience. For all of the previously mentioned reasons, both White and BIPOC Americans remain silent on racial issues, and some are loathe to acknowledge its very existence. This is consistent with contemporary color-blind rhetoric, which leads to a dysfunctional national discourse on race.

The task of this volume is to open up critical discussions about racial topics and debunk many of the commonly held myths that college students often bring with them to race courses. Debunking involves unmasking and deconstructing some of our most commonly held notions and beliefs. As Peter Berger (1963) writes in *Invitation to Sociology*,

The sociological frame of reference, with its built-in procedure of looking for levels of reality other than those given in the official interpretations of society, carries with it a logical imperative to unmask the pretensions and the propaganda by which [people] cloak their actions with each other. (p. 38)

A central premise of this reader is that debunking myths with accurate information and evidence can be an antidote to racism and racial prejudices. This is not an easy task, however, Liz Grauerholz (2007), former editor of the journal *Teaching Sociology*, states, “All information that students learn is filtered through their prior understandings of the world and these preconceptions can present major barriers to gaining new knowledge about the social world” (p. 15).

To be clear, mere exposure to the information isn’t sufficient. For good information to change attitudes, there must be a willingness to deeply

consider new information and an openness to change. In *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking*, M. Neil Browne and Stuart M. Keeley (2001) explain,

We bring lots of personal baggage to every decision we make—experiences, dreams, values, training, and cultural habits. If you are to grow, however, you need to recognize these feelings, and, as much as you are able, put them on the shelf for a bit. (p. 9)

Barriers to change exist for individuals in terms of their own ego and sense of identity, as well as their sense of the state of justice and fairness in the world. Indeed, we often perceive that we are being personally attacked when someone presents a position opposite to our own. The danger here is that “being emotionally involved in an issue prior to any active thought about it [means] that you may fail to consider potential good reasons for other positions—reasons that might be sufficient to change your mind on the issue if you would only listen to them” (Browne & Keeley, 2001, p. 9). Instead, part of what you will need to do when considering the essays in this volume is engage your critical thinking skills. Critical thinking involves, among other things, identifying assumptions and value conflicts, evaluating evidence, assessing logic, identifying significant omitted information, coming up with alternative positions and ideas, and developing a reasonable conclusion (Browne & Keeley, 2001). It is through this process that many of our conventional notions about race are debunked.

Early in this volume, we debunk perhaps one of the most commonly held myths about race: that it is a biological entity that is fixed and unchangeable and that can even explain why, for instance, Black folks excel at particular sports. As Daniel Buffington explains, citing scientific evidence where genotype is concerned, human beings are 99.9% identical when looking at nucleotide pairs, one of the building blocks of DNA. Indeed, genetic research suggests great similarity across racial and ethnic groups. When looking at this and other scientific research, Buffington (like most social scientists) concludes that race is mostly a social construct, where “the assignment of social importance to physical features occurred through social relations—such as migration and conquest, competition for scarce resources, and political challenges against the state.” This is a key claim of this volume: *Race is a social construct*. Because it is a social construct, the explanations for racial dynamics are located in the social as well. Thus, the overrepresentation of Black Americans in certain sports, such as basketball, can be more directly attributed to social factors, such as ampler opportunity in those sports (e.g., access to basketball courts in neighborhoods and schools), coupled with limited opportunities in the occupational structure of the United States (e.g., limited employment opportunities, particularly for Blacks located in neighborhoods with underfunded and underresourced schools).

The essays in this volume similarly reflect critical perspectives on commonly held racial myths. As you read each essay, in addition to the questions raised by the author, consider the following questions: Where or from whom have you heard this myth? Do you believe it yourself? Why or why not? What evidence have you heard in support of this kind of conventional wisdom? How is the myth debunked by the author of the essay? What other

information do you think would be useful for considering the questions raised in the essay, and where could you locate this information? Finally, ask yourself, why is this myth so often perpetuated? In other words, whose purposes are served by keeping this myth alive, and who is ultimately hurt by it? By considering these questions, you are deciding to make the effort to understand race and ethnicity in a critical fashion, as opposed to blindly accepting the multitude of racial/ethnic myths that dominate U.S. society.

Final Thoughts

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The essays in this volume share several key assumptions:

1. **History matters.** What are the historical events that have led to the racialized outcomes that the author(s) is(are) discussing? To what extent have these events been historicized through a lens of White supremacy? How does that affect how we perceive present-day racial/ethnic outcomes?
2. **Context matters.** Where and how does this social phenomenon take place? In which social spaces? How does it manifest on the (1) macro-level of social institutions (e.g., education, politics, the legal system, etc.), (2) micro-level of social interactions, and/or (3) meso-level of groups and organizations? How do our understandings of race and ethnicity intersect with issues of gender, sexuality, ability, citizenship, religion, and other categories of difference?
3. **Dialogue matters.** In order to have constructive dialogue on race and ethnicity, we need critically informed understandings. In other words, we must strive to disabuse ourselves of racial misinformation, so that we can have more constructive dialogue around the dynamics of race and ethnicity and how they manifest in everyday life.

Regarding the last point, as students of U.S. racial history and racial dynamics, you have the opportunity to change the nature of the dialogue around race. That requires not only a comprehensive understanding of the context in which we live, but also the courage, honesty, and good information needed to dispel conventional racial wisdom.

Some of you may have been exposed to the information in this book already and may have done the work necessary to modify your ideas and beliefs to fit this reality. As such, it may be difficult to watch your classmates and peers encounter information about race for the first time and not become frustrated and angry. Our hope is that having so much of the information needed to debunk some of the most common myths about race and ethnicity in the United States in one place will be useful to you as you engage your classmates and peers in important conversation.

Finally, there are several essays in the book that speak to specific issues related to language (Koch, Harkness) or, in the context of the myth, address

choices about language (Tatum). In general, we have chosen to use the term *BIPOC*, which refers to Black, Indigenous and people of color over the phrase *people of color* as we agree with those who suggest it helps to address the issue of anti-Blackness and the invisibility of Indigenous groups (Grady 2020). Relatedly, we chose the term *Indigenous* over *Native*, and where possible, have replaced the use of the generic term *American* to refer to people from the United States specifically. We have also chosen to use the term *Latinx*, given the inclusivity it provides, although we are aware this is far from a settled issue (de Onís, 2017). In addition, we capitalize both Black and White throughout, as is consistent with the APA style guide used by the publisher. While we understand the recent decision of the Associated Press (2020) to no longer capitalize White, we believe it is important to draw attention to the issue of Whites as a racial group with a history that ought to be subject to critical scrutiny (Nguyễn & Pendleton, 2020).

Not all of these preferences are consistent throughout the text, however. Some of those inconsistencies have to do with original source material, or are specific to the content addressed in the essay, or are because the contributing authors had a different preference. As we have discussed, issues of race are intimately interconnected with issues of power, privilege, and inequality. Language reflects these issues and is always evolving to reflect new knowledge about the limits of our ideas and our language (Collins, 2013). When in doubt, we believe it is best to defer to the stated preferences of people to whom the language applies and those preferences, just like the people, are not homogenous. It will not always be possible to get it exactly right. Instead, it is necessary to think critically, to listen humbly, and to stay open to change.

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SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Anderson, C. (2016). *White rage: The unspoken truth of our racial divide*. Bloomsbury.
- Berger, P. L. (1963). *Invitation to sociology: A humanistic perspective*. Anchor Books.
- Browne, M. N., & Keeley, S. (2001). *Asking the right questions: A guide to critical thinking*. Prentice Hall.
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- Kendi, I. X. (2016). *Stamped from the beginning: The definitive history of racist ideas in America*. Nation Books.
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial formation in the U.S.: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. Routledge.
- Tatum, B. D. (2017). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? And other conversations about race* (20th anniversary ed.). Basic Books.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. Prior to beginning college, how often had you thought about your race or ethnicity? When you did think about it, which events or occurrences prompted it?
2. How would you characterize what you learned early on about the racial and ethnic history of the United States? For example, what is the conventional wisdom you have heard surrounding White, Black, Latinx, Asian American, Indigenous, and Middle Eastern people?
3. As you begin this course, what are some of your questions surrounding race and ethnicity? If they are not covered in this book, write them down and bring them to class to discuss with your classmates. What can the essays in this book tell you about the answer(s) to your question(s)?

REACHING BEYOND THE COLOR LINE

Examining Your Attitudes Toward Race and Ethnicity: A Pretest and Posttest

Directions: At the beginning of the term, answer the following questionnaire. It is important to answer the questions as HONESTLY as possible, no matter how you think your answers may be perceived. After you have completed the course, look at your answers again to see if any have changed or if you think of these questions in a different way. What do you now know about race and ethnicity that you didn't know before?

1. When you were a child, did your parents talk about race? What messages about race did you receive from them? What messages did you receive from other relatives or agents of socialization (e.g., media, teachers, peers, community, religious figures)? What would you teach your children about race?
2. Do you think race is mostly about biology? Why or why not?
3. How do you define *racism*? Can anyone be racist?
4. Do you think Islamophobia should be considered a type of racism? Why or why not?

5. How have your views about race changed in the past 10 years? How have they changed in the past 5 years? Have they changed at all since you began college? In what ways and why?
6. What comes to mind when you think of #BlackLivesMatter?
7. Do you think it's time for people to stop talking about racism? Explain your answer.
8. Do you believe it is okay to make judgments about people based on how they dress, like whether they are wearing a hoodie, hijab, or turban? Can making judgments based on people's appearance ever be justified?
9. Consider our use of cultural items typically associated with groups of color, such as hip-hop music and Native American or (ostensibly) Asian symbols. Where is the line between respecting or celebrating these cultures and appropriating or exploiting them?
10. How do you explain the large numbers of Black men in prison? Is this the result of bad choices or something else?
11. Do you think racism is something that is still experienced by Black Americans who have achieved financial success? Why or why not?
12. Do you believe that all parents should do whatever they can to provide the best possible outcomes for their kids, even if it means other kids suffer?
13. What do you think accounts for health disparities across different racial and ethnic group?
14. Do Asian Americans value education more than other racial or ethnic groups? Is this a positive stereotype, or is it harmful to Asian Americans or other racial and ethnic groups in some way?
15. Why do you think people who come to this country don't immediately learn English?
16. U.S. culture subscribes heavily to the idea that with hard work, anyone can succeed. Do you think this is true? What should we glean from the successes of people like Barack Obama, Kobe Bryant (i.e., "the Mamba mentality"), or Oprah Winfrey? When figures like this promote meritocratic ideals, do you think that makes the U.S. public cling harder to this notion? Why or why not?
17. Do you think that affirmative action is a good way to deal with racial or ethnic disparities in education or employment? Why or why not?
18. Consider the current debates over citizenship. What things might shape our understanding of who is and isn't a citizen or who should or shouldn't be a citizen? What do you believe is the right response to individuals who are seeking access to this country?
19. Do you believe people are overly concerned with how we refer to racial or ethnic groups? Does it matter whether or not we use *African American* or *Black*, *Indian* or *Native American*, *Hispanic* or *Latino/a* or *Latinx*?
20. Is it ever okay for non-Black groups to use the N-word? Why or why not?
21. Consider your campus community. Do students of different racial groups socialize with one another? Do you witness deep friendships across racial and ethnic lines? Why or why not?
22. Is it possible to be friends with, date, or marry someone of a different race and still be racist? Explain your answer.
23. What other questions would you add to this list?

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