

Antiracism Education Forum

“Proracism vs. Racism”

What is race?

Race is a social construct

The popular classifications of race are based chiefly on skin color, with other relevant features including height, eyes, and hair. Though these physical differences may appear, on a superficial level, to be very dramatic, they are determined by only a minute portion of the genome: we as a species have been estimated to **share 99.9% of our DNA** with each other. The few differences that do exist reflect differences in environments and external factors, not core biology.

-Vivian Chou, Ph.D.

“Race is not biological. **It is a social construct.** There is no gene or cluster of genes common to all blacks or all whites. Were race “real” in the genetic sense, racial classifications for individuals would remain constant across boundaries. Yet, a person who could be categorized as black in the United States might be considered white in Brazil or colored in South Africa.”

-Angela Onwuachi-Willig, J.D.

What is Racism?

Racial or ethnic prejudice, intolerance

Supporting racist policy through direct action, or inaction

Expression of racist ideology

Racism is viewed as only committed and experienced on an individual basis (“bad acts by bad people”)

Racism: Food for Thought

What, if anything, do you have to add?

Kate: I think of racism in a broader sense, as the social organization of society that's based on oppressing people on different (inaudible) expressions which is usually enforced by individual racist ideology but can exist without that.

Tom M: I would add that, in the American context, racism is a European invention designed to provide ideological and moral cover for the exploitation of the rest of the world and, in the US particularly African-American slaves and Native American land.

Lloyd: I believe racism is a conscious or unconscious categorization of other people which leads to either fear or anxiety in individuals who feel it.

Monteze: In my experience from living in other parts of the world, racism isn't uniquely a European invention. I saw it among different groups in West Africa, in Nicaragua, in Costa Rica, Tunisia, and Morocco when I lived in those countries. The human capacity to identify others as "the other" seems to be relatively, in my experience, endemic in human nature. It's like jealousy, but worse than jealousy. It's like many emotions humans may be victim to, something that one learns. It's endemic and against whom it's displayed is taught in the culture, in the family, in the schools—everywhere—and it takes conscious effort to reframe that view of differences.

What is “Proracism”?

When you are not actively “Antiracist,” scholars such as Robin Diangelo, Ibram Kendi, and Layla Saad argue that you default to “Proracism”

Proracists do not intentionally commit racist acts or adhere to racist ideology. However, they do benefit from a society based on white privilege

Hart: I object to being given a label of proracism because I have enjoyed privileges as a white person and I consider myself an antiracist based on what I think, have experienced, and feel now.

Wendy: We're not putting people into these, we're just describing them as being aspects of what we're dealing with

Hart: I just really don't like the term and its definition.

Astra: Right. We're not offering that as a definition. We're offering Friends what is "out there." That's a construct that scholars have come up with. So in terms of education/ information, we're offering that as what the current ideology, the current thoughts around racism and antiracism are. That's a construct by other scholars.

Pam: The first question, "If I commit a racist act with no racist intent, am I a racist?"--I believe that, because I believe in the definition of racism as not a personal experience of it--like "feeling" racism--but actually aligning and supporting policies and morays that exist in the culture that are inherently racist and based on white supremacy. So I think we are racist when we don't know we're acting with racist intent, but it aligns with a racist policy that has racist impact.

Hank: What it meant to me to be “white” in this society came home to me in 1962 when I was working with teenagers in Ebenezer Church in Atlanta. We’d heard the theater downtown Atlanta was desegregated, so two Black teenagers and I went to the cinema and as we approached the box office the clerk said, “I’m sorry. I’ve already admitted six Blacks. You three would be nine. I cannot let you in.”

So it came home to me that all my life, I’d had the privilege of being white, but suddenly—because of who I was with—I was Black.

Monteze: I admit to understanding racism as being operative on three levels—personal, community, and systemic. I believe that there are two dimensions to an act—one is intent, and the other is the consequence. So I may do something or not do something when I could have done something to stop the acts of others that impinge upon my friends of color. I may do things with all good intent, or no conscious intent and it may have a negative effect on another and I think my act or inaction is racist. I don’t think I am at this point in my life racist to the core. But I do admit to still having consequences to people that are damaging to other people and groups.

Tom L: I react, also, to being called a racist when I don't think I'm intentionally doing something. But I think it's useful to use the term "racist," to keep the term in front, to keep the issue in mind. When I'm called out, I would hope I would not be called a racist if I do something, especially if it's unintentional. But I'd rather instead be called a unintentional racist collaborator, much as if I were a Nazi collaborator. Keep the idea of racism in there, because I certainly feel I am a racist collaborator. But I would hope it would be unintentional.

Deborah: I understand the intent of the term pro-racist but I feel there's a huge gap between encouraging people to understand they are the quite possibly unconscious beneficiaries of a racist system (which all of us with white skin are) to being pinned with a label that is most commonly used—although not accurately used—to describe individual actions and attitudes.

Tom M: I really like the second question: *If you're white, how do you personally experience being white?* I know I make a point of never forgetting that I am white, that my ancestors are European American. One aspect of racism that's very common for people with my background is to think that we are "the Americans" and other people—are "African American" or "Asian American." And yet we're just Americans.

Lloyd: I'd like to comment also on the term "proracism." I think it carries with it a meaning of systemic benefits, or of systemic consequences. We live in a highly individualistic society...so if you think only strategically as to how one mobilizes white people to become more aware, if you put people on the defensive immediately with a systemic category, I think it's complicated and perhaps counterproductive. So I appreciate the importance of the argument—but I wonder if it's a way to reach people who cannot recognize already some kind of systemic pattern.

Karen: I'm very interested in this question *If you're white, how do you personally experience being white?* I'm a Jewish American, that's where I come from. My parents were involved in the civil rights movement. So my experience of being white in America is that I have a responsibility to reach out as a bridge builder to other people who suffer from discrimination and violence, and all that kind of thing—racism. And it's my responsibility to befriend people—all people—and to recognize that everybody makes mistakes, absolutely everybody, and that everybody can be a friend. And that as a privileged person, it's my responsibility to use that privilege on behalf of others and, you know, share the wealth, be responsible, take action. So I think that these categories of racist and non-racist and proracist and all that are extremely limiting. I mean, they're not realistic. They're not comprehensive enough. That's my experience.

Ruth: I have experience being white and privileged when I've been arrested. I've seen that the police were treating me very well. Saying "Please don't get arrested, it's going to be very, very hard on you." And I did get arrested and went to jail. And I saw other people who are not white who are experiencing something other than what I experienced. I saw people being pulled, dragged, carried, and handcuffed behind their backs where I'd said "Please put the handcuffs in front." So many different ways. Even talking with guards in Wake County at the jail who are not white—they'd heard my story and I'd say, "How is it for you?" And they look at me and shake their heads and say "It's not like that for me." The Asian American guard and the African American guard. So I know, every day of my life, that I am privileged being white.

Proracism: Food for Thought

If I commit a racist act with no racist intent, am I a racist?

If you're white, how do you personally experience being white? What is your white experience?

Three levels of racism: Personal, Community, Systemic

What is “Antiracism”?

The absence of deliberate racism paired with a focus on racial healing

The conscious intention to treat people of all races with respect

Robin Diangelo

White people have the duty to learn about systemic racism, internalize the need to change individually and societally, and mitigate any racial harm they may perpetrate

John McWhorter

It would be great for white America to understand and cease their complicity, but it's not a requirement for Black America to begin to heal. We must look at our current reality and reconstruct it. "Outwoking" each other is a distraction. To reduce challenges facing real Black people, focus on these

- 1) End the war on drugs
- 2) Teach phonics to children with no/low access to books and reading
- 3) Stop making college the ideal for everyone. Create solid opportunities for vocational training and employment for poor people

Dolly Chugh

All humans have the need to see ourselves as “good people”

Failing to be “good” (e.g., complicity in systemic racism), threatens this foundational identity. We defend this identity in a variety of ways, at times compounding racial harm

Becoming conscious of this bias allows us to be more like “the people we mean to be”

Antiracism: Food for Thought

Why is Antiracism so difficult and so emotionally charged?

Uncertainty about how to proceed: “Should I be color-blind, color-conscious, or...?”

Even the experts can’t agree on vocabulary and course of action

Bonnie: You know I worked in a school for abused and delinquent kids. We had a mixed group—it was mixed Black, Puerto Rican, and white. White was the minority. We lived in the same cottage and we ate together, we did everything together. And even when I was sick, the nurse allowed the kids to take care of me. She didn't need to come up because they took care of me. They took me to the bathroom, they brought the food from the kitchen for me to eat. We were in each other's lives all the time. Touching, holding. In fact, I wrote some things about some of the kids I worked with because I have a need to project what these kids are like to people on the outside because they think they're mean and difficult and they steal and whatever. So I tell them about my kids. And sometimes they don't like that and they go "ugh," but that's okay, even if just one person hears about it.

I wrote something for the group about a birthday party I had when I was nine and I had a Black friend over and afterwards a neighbor yelled at me: Didn't I know I wasn't supposed to have a Black person on our block? And this was a friend from school, we worked on the same project in school. And I started crying and I told my father and he was furious, just furious. He ran to the neighbor, who was very prejudiced, and he yelled at him. He said "My daughter will have whoever she wants at her party and you have no impact on that. Don't ever talk to her again." So I got the feeling from my father that it was something I should be proud of, not something that was a negative to me. When I took the kids I worked with out to lunch someplace, I'd expose them to certain experiences and they would always be nervous about how to behave. But I think the exposure made a huge difference.

Buzz: Despite the fact that races don't exist—as we began the forum by saying—we continue to talk as though they do exist. As our website says prominently, “We welcome all people regardless of age, race, differing ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.” Even our statement on antiracism says “Chapel Hill Friends Meeting affirms that racism in the United States is real, harsh and damaging to all people of every race, ethnicity, color, nationality or immigration status.” Many in the Meeting are participating in the effort to remove the names of prominent racists as the names of our streets. Equally important I think is the need to remove mention of race from our speech. I propose that when we need to write about race that we put it in quotes. Thus *We welcome all people regardless of age, “race,” differing ability, gender identity and sexual orientation*. Or when we need to talk about it, we preface it with “so-called,” as in “so-called” race. I think continuing to talk about race as though it were something real continues to divide people.

John: I think of racism as an attitude, an attitude that I bring to all of my actions that serves my purposes, whether they be personal actions, or community actions or systemic actions. And I think, as somebody said earlier, that the terms pro- or antiracism are very off putting. I immediately become defensive. So I was playing in my head with language and thought, What about if it's my actions that are supporting or challenging racism—I'd find that a much more inclusive conversation to have. Are my actions supporting racism or are my actions challenging racism. I'm not in a box then, all the time. And I'm allowed to be “I didn't know that, I made a mistake.”

Tom McQ: This conversation makes me think about how people who don't want to acknowledge racism think about and speak about racism: *I am not a racist, I'm not responsible for my ancestors, you are bringing up racism to make me feel guilty, my children don't need to feel guilty because they didn't do anything wrong.* So it requires an analysis that recognizes that racism operates; it is so built into US systems that it operates even though nobody acts overtly in a racist way. Segregation in housing, employment, schools, all those things exist and have been made operational to continue without intervention. Everybody's got clean hands. So when we talk about antiracism it means we are going to commit to cleaning up the mess that we've created. We have a history of "doing something about race" every 50 years or so in this country. Then we dust off our hands and say "Oh, good that's over." But it never has been, But that means not to focus on what it is, but on what it's becoming. Focus less on who we are and more on who we're becoming. Less on our social circumstances and more on how we are creating change that will cure the evils of racism as they exist profoundly, ubiquitously in the United States.

Ruth: I agree with Tom completely. But I'd like to mention the fact that there's the economic benefit of racism, and that has existed for...forever. In my lifetime, I've seen where the benefits of racism exist on an economic level, and we've got to do something about it.

Julia: I thought it was interesting, the two authors you mentioned at the beginning. Because I listened to “White Fragility,” and I felt horrible and small and paralyzed. And then I was blessed by the John McWhorter *Atlantic* article coming into my inbox and I read it and I felt so relieved. It helped me understand why I felt so uncomfortable with that book. You know, he says, you’re not giving the benefit that I can have a conversation with somebody and I can mess up and say something insensitive and that I’m not going to make somebody cry. I feel like I have a good relationship with people, that I look them eye to eye. Because I’m Quaker, I look for that of God in everyone. It’s not that I’m color blind, but it’s that I try to see beyond that and then understand who people are. But if you feel like, there’s no way I can even have a meaningful conversation with someone because I come from a privileged white background, then that’s just—emasculating, I guess. I appreciated his confidence in the possibility of us being able to have good relationships. There’s a whole lot of stuff that I have yet to learn. But I hated being afraid to open my mouth. I just keep continuing to have conversations where I can understand and learn more. But it’s so complex.

Kate: I was raised to be actively racist. The community that I grew up in was actively hostile towards nonwhite people and I was raised to believe I shouldn't associate with them. And so after I left, I tried to unlearn that. And it's hard to completely unlearn that; I own that I have racist instincts. But I felt like that was my responsibility, and once I had unlearned overt racism and broken the link in my mind that "nonwhite means bad" that that was the end of my responsibility as an individual actor. It wasn't until a few years ago when this discussion about antiracism permeated all of America again that I learned that unlearning my individual racial hostility isn't all there is. Not having personal hostility isn't antiracist, especially when systems of oppression exist. Even if no one has individual racial hostility, those systems of oppression will still function. So my responsibility, at the very minimum, is to find out which politicians and policies are supporting things that will help resolve persistent racial oppression in the US and voting for them. Or figuring out which organizations are helping to solve racial inequality and donating to them or volunteering with them. It isn't enough to not personally feel racist. You have to be actively working towards resolving persistent racial inequality in order to be antiracist in my mind. I find this concern about whether we're going to call ourselves antiracist because it's divisive is a real success on the part of people who don't want us to talk about racism. If we say, "Oh, antiracist is a harsh word and maybe we should just say we're against racism" or that "we aren't supporting racism"--I feel that softens it to the point where we can't discuss racism anymore.

Tom M: I think the presenters did a great job of saying race does not exist biologically, but it does exist socially. It's a social construct. Does that mean it's not important? No—it's an incredibly important social construct which created the wealth of Europe in large measure by oppressing and stealing from people of all races across the globe. And of course America is an extension of Europe. It's still very powerful and existing today, so we can't stop talking about race and pretend it doesn't exist. But we need to be clear it's not a biological construct.

In light of this, where do we as a Meeting go from here?

What speaks to you? What are you curious about?
*What is the quality of your intent?**

*Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall

Karen: I think it's important to understand that different people have different capacities in their lives. For example, I have the capacity to befriend people. I do not have the capacity to volunteer for organizations because of health concerns. I have the capacity to give money, so I do. And I think one of the problems with this whole proracism/antiracism conversation—I love the conversation, except that there's a lot of blame going on and a lot of assumptions about what people should do to prove that they hate institutionalized racism. I think that befriending people is something our very predominately white congregation can do. Cities have sister cities, like Durham has a sister city in Venezuela. I'm wondering if we can have a sister church. What about the Second Baptist Church on Graham Street? We could just say, "Hey—do you want to be friends?" I think human beings have dignity and we should get to know each other.

Tom M: I just want to be clear about what we have done so far, and about the origins of this Forum. Peace and Justice Committee created a subcommittee called the Antiracism committee, of which Astra is the clerk. The Antiracism committee has been meeting monthly and has created subcommittees. The Education subcommittee is the subcommittee that put this Forum on. The Antiracism committee also has a Legislative subcommittee and we are thinking of lots of ways that we as groups and the Meeting as a whole can be and act in an antiracist way.

Jennifer: I've been struck by the folks who've talked about how one piece is our own self-reflection but that it's so important for us to act in the world. We live in a society with profound injustice and inequity that is at the systemic level. So how can we support FCNL, how can we work through other organizations to be a force for creating a more equitable world?

Alice: I remember probably thirty or so years ago when we did pair up with a Black church. It was one on Rosemary Street. I remember going there with a toddler—which was quite a challenge—to attend a worship service. I'd like to see us do that again because my need is to know more Black people. Our Meeting is predominately white, and I just don't have enough friends that are Black. I would like that, and this seems like one way we could do that. I know the pandemic limits us, but I would really like for us to pair with a Black congregation and have some social interaction.

Hank: The barriers to housing, to employment, and to education are ostensibly not racial. And yet they are working effectively to keep Black people and people of color out of employment, out of housing, and out of a good education. Because there is not a large single apartment complex in Chapel Hill which admits many Black people because 62% of the people in prison are Black versus only 22% of the population. So go to a housing complex and try to get in. And yet many of the people who run these establishments, such as (inaudible) at Glen Lennox, who said "I'm not going admit anyone with a misdemeanor, even if it's ten years old, because this would subject the other residents to contact with 'criminals.'" I'm proud that, in 2012, two of our members did go to the Chapel Hill/Carrboro town council, to Hillsborough and the county commissioners and say "It's time to get rid of the question about criminal conviction."

And each one of these government organizations did so. If you apply today to one of those organizations for employment in the town of Chapel Hill, you will not be subjected to that initial question. But company after company in Chapel Hill and in Orange county asks that question initially.

Friday, one of my clients had to explain why he purchased a beer on the street and was convicted of a misdemeanor for having it open. So what's happening now is we need to take the initiative to do something about this because many people don't think they're being racial when they prevent people from getting housing, from getting a job, or from getting a good education. Ostensibly not for racial reasons, but for other reasons such as a criminal background. Or poverty, which keeps people from getting some of the jobs right now which require internet access. We need to take action, to talk to apartment landlords, we need to convince employers, and we need to find ways for people to get a better education.

John: A very quick reflection as a newcomer to the Chapel Hill Meeting: I'm very gratified and supportive of a Meeting that wants to emphasize "calling in" rather than "calling out." Calling in is inclusive and unifying and I have seen how painful a "calling out" culture is to a Meeting. Secondly, I'm gratified to hear a Meeting that says, "We need to continue to talk, continue to educate, and simultaneously, continue to work. We are committed to action, education, and learning. We are a continuing revelation, individually and collectively. I like that.

Tom McQ (referenced from chat by Astra): *We need to continue with whole community discussions on race. One forum a month would not be too much. This should always lead to consideration of and commitment to actions.*

Astra: We welcome your ideas about how we can keep talking about this. That's what today was about. Anyone who wants to join the Antiracism Committee, we're here and we're ready to work. Thank you all for being here. It's been such a great opportunity to talk and to listen.

30/22 ARC-Ed Forum Chat History

08:39:40 From Emilie to Everyone:

1 min left for section one

08:40:34 From Cristóbal (he/him) to Everyone:

The social construct of race has real impact on individual bodies, families, and communities through the force of law regardless of individual action, inaction, or preference.

08:43:44 From Tom McQ to Everyone:

In the US., race is nothing (a social construct), but in the US, it is everything and ubiquitous (socio-political-economic).

08:46:32 From Tom McQ to Everyone:

in essence, in the US,, there are no neutrals in relation to racism.

08:52:14 From Hart to Everyone:

I understand that scholars have started using this term.

08:55:22 From Emilie to Everyone:

11 minute left in Section 2

08:55:44 From Emilie to Everyone:

1 min left in Sec 2

08:56:41 From Cristóbal (he/him) to Everyone:

My experience of being white is that I have the choice about whether or not to consider race in interactions. Because I speak Spanish and have a name associated with latinos, when I choose to show that, I have experienced people using racial slurs against latinos. If I use my surname in interactions, this does not happen. I can choose because my white skin allows me that choice.

08:58:06 From Karen to Everyone:

Additionally: That being white always implies complicity in a stratified society, without awareness of the rotten nature of discrimination, etc. This just isn't realistic or fair. It, in itself, is prejudicial.

09:06:52 From Cristóbal (he/him) to Everyone:

That something is a social construct does not mean it doesn't exist.

09:07:15 From Kate to Everyone:

^ Agree.

09:09:11 From Cristóbal (he/him) to Everyone:

Law is a social construct. Law is very real in our lives.

09:09:31 From Karen to Everyone:

Understood.

09:14:29 From Betsy to Everyone:

Please give source of John McWhorter article. Or can you send out via email to us?

09:14:50 From Lloyd to Everyone:

Sonny Kelly, who performs an excellent one-person play called "The Talk," (which describes how black parents must talk about the police with their children) often argues that the best way forward is "to call people in" rather than to "call people out." This is the pathway to a shared anti-racist project?

09:14:54 From Pam to Everyone:

yes, sources for all you referenced would be helpful

09:15:20 From Pam to Everyone:

I like that...calling people in!

09:15:58 From Julia to Everyone:

google John McWhorter and Atlantic

09:16:50 From Tom McQ to Everyone:

In early US Quakerism, Quaker slave owners claimed to be "good to" their slaves. Other Quakers called for them to be this way. This was in spite of not allowing slave families to live together. Hypocrites all. Other Quakers called them on this. Antiracists. Thank goodness.

09:17:55 From Emilie to Everyone:

1 min left in this section

09:19:30 From Emilie to Everyone:

time up for section3

09:23:02 From Tom McQ to Everyone:

We need to continue with whole community discussions on race. One forum a month would not be too much. This should always lead to consideration of and commitment to actions.

09:25:44 From Emilie Condon to Everyone:

I remember taking our son to First Baptist Church, historic black church monthly to learn from that spiritual home as well as our our Quaker meeting

09:26:05 From Emilie to Everyone:

1 min left in this forum

09:27:11 From Pam to Everyone:

another option is to introduce an anti-racism statement that we might read before any of our committee meetings or meetings for business. This would keep the query in front of us - how do our decisions impact racism?

09:28:58 From Dottie to Everyone:

How do we think that CHFM is a place where a Black church would want to participate?

09:29:07 From Julia to Everyone:

In the past our meeting helped start the first segregated school in the area. How are we supporting that school in their efforts to increase their diversity and spread Quaker values?

09:29:16 From John to Everyone:

I'd suggest we work first, talk second

09:29:52 From Lloyd to Everyone:

Thank you Astra for helping us move forward on this difficult issue.

09:31:19 From Karen to Everyone:

We are people of the Light. That's the reason another church would want to join with us!

09:31:28 From Deborah to Everyone:

Thanks to the ARC!

09:31:29 From Pam to Everyone:

thank you!!!!

09:32:05 From Tom M to Everyone:

Thank you, beloved Meeting.

Thank you for being here

For more information on the ARC Education
Subcommittee, email
antiracismeducation@chapelhillfriends.org

Proracism Vs. Antiracism Forum: Materials for Preparation

We will draw on the work of the three antiracism educators—Dolly Chugh, John McWhorter, and Robin Diangelo. For each, we have listed a book, an article, and a short video. (Don't worry—we are not asking Friends to read three books by January 30.) Both articles and videos are listed so Friends have a choice of how to access information about each scholar's work, as some people prefer to watch videos for information and others prefer to read.

We also encourage Friends to take the Harvard Implicit Association Test and to read the discussion material below.

Please contact antiracismeducation@chapelhillfriends.org with any questions.

Harvard Implicit Association Test

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

What is the quality of your intent?*

As humans, we default to viewing and dissecting socio-political issues through the lens and language best known and most comfortable to us. It is through this default position, then, that we find our community, vote for our politicians, accept or reject policy and, ultimately, determine our reality and in whom/what we can believe moving forward. Our attempts to understand racism, of course, are no different in that we come to understand it through what we live, see, and learn – in this way hunkering down into our default positions. But, with anti-racism, it's a little different.

As a country, we have been discussing racism far longer than we've been discussing anti-racism. We know a little or a lot about the history of slavery and racism but we're just now trying to understand how we can pivot to a new stance without allowing this history to paralyze us with shame or dread; we are increasingly feeling more and more uncomfortable in our default places.

So, what do we do? The information, theories, frameworks, data, language, etc. are numerous and divergent. Where and how do we begin meaningful discussion? It's the hope of the Anti-Racism Education Committee that you'll take the journey with us as we explore and discuss how we thresh out our anti-racism lens and language, as individuals, as Friends, and in community. We strive to explore and look at anti-racist thoughts, ideologies, language, and work on all levels – micro (individual), mezzo (communal), and macro (societal) -- with curiosity, openness, and compassion. In doing so, perhaps, we shift our stance from default to something greater--into a position we learn, create, and choose for ourselves, a position from which we see clearly and act comfortably – a powerful stance of strength.

**“What is the quality of your intent? . . . When we intend to do good, we do. When we intend to do harm, it happens. What each of us must come to realize is that our intent always comes through” -Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall*

Conversation #1: How do we “see” race and ethnicity?

Over the recent years, we've seen increasing debate around the lens and language with which we see ethnicity and race. Some argue that we need to highlight, or at least consider, skin color and ethnicity in our interactions. Others argue that we should be colorblind in the effort to truly connect across racial lines. So, you might ask: Is it bad or good to be colorblind? If I believe in the Light in all people regardless of their ethnicity – where does that put me?

First perspective: We all should be colorblind

Everyone is equal and should be treated and seen as individuals. In focusing on commonality rather than difference, it's easier to connect with people and move past any barriers our differences may cause.

Even if we can't quote it word for word, we all know the famous line from Dr. King's March on Washington: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character”. He went on to say, “as I stand here and look out upon the thousands of negro faces, and the thousands of white faces, intermingled like the waters of a river, I see only one face – the face of the future”.

So, according to Dr. King, don't we want to overcome seeing skin color when we act as an individual/community/society? Why do some now consider it “bad” to say you're colorblind?

Second perspective: We should all be racially conscious

Race is relevant to social and political life and should be acknowledged and talked about. Our experiences of the world are based in and influenced by certain factors related to our identity – one of largest factors being race/ethnicity. Our experience of navigating the world is hugely influenced by the color of our skin.

In a racialized society (i.e., we hold racial “categories”), when we strip someone of their skin color then, ipso facto, we ignore a huge part of that person’s identity, character, and lived experience. We build character by interacting with and within our day-to-day world and circumstances. In that context, when skin color (both of color and white) is a factor of every interaction, how can we divorce that experience from character?

Exploration:

- What’s your perspective? Do you agree with the first or second offered above, something in between, or something else entirely?
- How is it that we “see” race and ethnicity through these particular lenses? What is the ideology behind each perspective? How do you think these ideologies impact our actions and interactions on an individual, community and societal level?

Discussion:

Maybe, we need both. It's possible to see merit and pitfalls in each of the two perspectives and it's possible to see through both lenses simultaneously.

Colorblindness is a reflection of *the ideal* - what should be in the future. In a utopian world, no one would see color - we would (will?) be able to connect on the heart level - individual to individual, community to community. Racial lines and categories would be erased and we would see and relate to all as equals and individuals.

The problem with this view, although moral, beautiful, and just, is that it does not take into account *what is*. We currently live in a non-utopian world; we have yet to attain the ideal. In our current racialized society, that must be taken into account. In this environment, if we solely focus on the ideal, we completely ignore and dismiss people's lived experiences and reality. We fail to see the person as a whole and, therefore, fail to see them as an individual.

Similarly, race consciousness is, in its own way, an ideology that some argue hampers us from moving forward. Linguist, author, and activist **John McWhorter*** describes the current anti-racism movement as a “new religion”. Much of the rhetoric and thinking of race consciousness concentrates on white privilege and the deconstruction of “white identity” as a path to equality in and between all racial “categories”. Not everyone, however, buys into this approach -- it has spread only among a small minority, primarily those educated in the complexity of the ideology. In fact, many find the language and conversation within this paradigm inaccessible and alienating. Further, there’s an inherent contradiction within this paradigm: in focusing on the erasure of the “category” of whiteness, we find ourselves ignoring and dismissing white people’s lived experiences and reality – expressly contradicting the basic tenet of race consciousness.

So, let’s consider a third perspective: We hold both ideologies to be true. If we truly and honestly allow ourselves to open and see *what is* and simultaneously hold true our belief in the ideal, we create spaces for difficult, honest, uncomfortable, rewarding, and empowering conversation. It is this exploration and discussion, rather than separate ideologies and approaches, that unites us and moves us forward.

Exploration:

- Are there other ideologies/perspectives/approaches you identify with?
- Why is the word “category” in quotation marks?
- How do you think race should be “seen”?

Two PBS videos on Reconstruction-era strategies to prevent Black independence

<https://www.pbs.org/video/slavery-another-name-laws-criminalize-black-life/>

<https://www.pbs.org/video/slavery-another-name-origins-black-codes/>

Dolly Chugh

Book

The Person You Mean To Be: How Good People Fight Bias

Article by Dolly Chugh on implicit bias:

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/seven_ways_to_fight_bias_in_your_everyday_life

Video Interview with Dolly Chugh

https://youtu.be/L8lcK8eD_4Y

John McWhorter

Book

Woke Racism: How A New Religion Has Betrayed Black America

Print interview with John McWhorter (includes link for recorded 6 minute NPR McWhorter interview)

<https://www.npr.org/2021/11/05/1052650979/mcwhorters-new-book-woke-racism-attacks-leading-thinkers-on-race>

Video Interview with John McWhorter

<https://youtu.be/1TSCjXESRow>

Robin DiAngelo

Book

[Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm](#)

Print interview (The New Yorker) with Robin DiAngelo

Video Interview with Robin DiAngelo

<https://youtu.be/ANdiTJKm-g>