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Takeaways from *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*

There are so many pieces of information and nuggets of wisdom that would be extremely beneficial to future teachers, especially white teachers. I have to be careful quoting because I will end up quoting the entire page or chapter, in some cases. I think an easier conversation to approach would be chapter two of the book, “What Do You See When You See Me?: Implicit Bias.” One line that I underlined that I like to keep in the back of my mind is: “unconscious prejudices can manifest as racist actions, that’s the whole problem… you don’t even have to know you’re racist for the damage to be done” (25). Everyone, including teachers, have implicit biases. We can all work to reduce them, but there’s always something there. As teachers, we are in the forefront of the classroom and the face of our students’ education. If those implicit biases are not made aware to ourselves, we can easily and mistakenly present them to our students, which could hurt a lot of rapport we work hard to build as teachers between our students, our colleagues, our principals, our school board, our communities, and so on.

Another take away I gleaned from *Uncomfortable Conversations* is Acho’s breakdown of the terms, *protest*, *riot*, *rebellion*, *massacre*, and *civil disobedience*, in chapter thirteen, “Good Trouble: Fighting for Change.” With the protests coming out of the Black Lives Movement, there are different reports on how these demonstrations are being perceived. Although he doesn’t give a straightforward definition of each, he does break down the terms in regard to how society interprets them, as depending on who is involved and what happens and who is perceiving the demonstration, each is used in different ways in different circumstances. For example, Acho states,

“Throughout all this history, white privilege has ruled how these conflicts were described. When it was white people instigating the violence, the media, politicians, law enforcement, and eventually historians called what was a massacre a *race riot*. When black people started the protests, the media called what was a rebellion a riot, a description meant to portray white people… as persecuted victims of unjustified black anger and hostility, while also making white policing of the situation, no matter how brutal, into a heroic or at least justified response” (164-5).

In summation, Acho states, “This is an uncomfortable conversation because it has to do with power and perspective. As I’ve been saying, there’s often no difference whatsoever between a riot and rebellion besides who’s looking at it and labeling it” (169). I think the idea of these terms being placed on events in American history is interesting. Being able to analyze why history (which is typically written from the white male perspective) has chosen to label an event or demonstration a specific way and who is behind why we have labeled it that way is an important skill students and educators should possess. Understanding that perspective plays a part in why we call the Boston Tea Party and destruction of goods in the 1700s as a form of rebellion and the George Floyd protests as a riot instead of vice versa is a unique yet vital skill that readers can take from *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*.

My final takeaway, but definitely not the last take away that could be gathered from Acho’s book, is a little section in the back of the book that could easily be overlooked, as it is hidden after the Acknowledgements. Acho uses section, named “Quick Talks,” to briefly discuss smaller topics, such as “Lotion,” “Black Women’s Hair,” “Sagging,” and more. These quips do a nice job giving an overview on the subject, breaking down stereotypes, and quick advice and histories.