

Racial Justice

FAQs

How does someone respond to a black person/POC when they say that a white person cannot possibly understand what they have gone through in their lives.

- The truth is you probably can't. However, it is the duty of white people to educate themselves about the history of racism that people of color have and continue to endure.
- We are living in a time when conversations about racism are inevitable between most friends of different races. If you want to have those talks, educate yourself on aspects of racial inequality but don't expect your African American friends to shoulder the burden for your lessons in social justice.
- "There are times when the person of color is placed in the difficult position of being teacher in trying to educate their friend about race, racism, and systemic oppression," says Dr. Tina M. Harris, chair of race, media and cultural literacy at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication. "They are assuming emotional labor in a space that should have minimal stress."
- So remember: When you build a strong, genuine foundation in a friendship, it leaves less room for someone to question your intentions. And it makes discussing issues of race less awkward.

-Faith Karimi, CNN

What do you say to someone who insists they are not a racist?

- Believe them.
- However, if they prove themselves to be racist, see the answer to **How should one respond to someone who tells a racist joke or makes a racist comment?** The same advice applies.

How should one respond to someone who tells a racist joke or makes a racist comment?

- Confronting your friends or family about their racism isn't easy. We tend to cut our loved ones more slack. But activists say it's important to let people know when their comments or behavior is racist.
- To tackle these difficult conversations, we gathered tips from Grace Aheron, communications director for the nonprofit Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), who says it's White people's responsibility "to do that labor and not rely on people of color to have to be always the ones teaching White people about racism."
 - **Be discreet:** Aheron says it's best to have your discussions in a private forum or in person one-on-one. Avoid responding with a public Facebook comment. "We've found that the in-person, private situation will make people feel less defensive."
 - **Be curious, not judgmental:** Make your discussion sound more like an invitation, instead of an accusation. Ask them to tell you why they feel the way they do and what kinds of experiences shaped their beliefs. It's important for your friend or family member to understand you come from a place of care, Aheron says, instead of feeling like they're under attack.
 - **Research is good, but...:** It never hurts to have data disproving common misconceptions up your sleeve, but statistics don't typically change people's minds, Aheron says. "It's stories and experiences and feeling

heard and feeling you're connecting to people." Share your own moments of realizing you did or said something racist and how you've been educating yourself since.

- **Stay calm:** These conversations aren't meant to be easy. But if you lose your temper, you lose the point. "If you start to feel yourself getting upset or overwhelmed, have a plan for that. Maybe have a pause in the conversation. Write down on your hand, if you're talking on the phone, 'Take three deep breaths,' or something like that."
- **Be patient:** Don't expect to change anyone's mind overnight. Instead, view your first talk as a first step. "It's not a one-and-done kind of thing," Aheron says. "The goal is to start the conversation and keep the door open."

-Christina Maxouris, CNN

How do you respond when a white person says that the US/world/state has already given so much to black people, why do blacks want more?

- The American Dream assumes that we all have an equal opportunity to generate the kind of wealth that brings meaning to the words "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," boldly penned in the Declaration of Independence. The American Dream portends that with hard work, a person can own a home, start a business, and grow a nest egg for generations to draw upon. This belief, however, has been defied repeatedly by the United States government's own decrees that denied wealth-building opportunities to Black Americans.
- Today, the average white family has roughly 10 times the amount of wealth as the average Black family. White college graduates have over seven times more wealth than Black college graduates. Making the American Dream an equitable reality demands the same U.S. government that denied wealth to Blacks restore that deferred wealth through reparations to their descendants in the form of individual cash payments in the amount that will close the Black-white racial wealth divide. Additionally, reparations should come in the form of wealth-building opportunities that address racial disparities in education, housing, and business ownership.
- In 1860, over \$3 billion was the value assigned to the physical bodies of enslaved Black Americans to be used as free labor and production. This was more money than was invested in factories and railroads combined. In 1861, the value placed on cotton produced by enslaved Blacks was \$250 million. Slavery enriched white slave owners and their descendants, and it fueled the country's economy while suppressing wealth building for the enslaved. The United States has yet to compensate descendants of enslaved Black Americans for their labor. Nor has the federal government atoned for the lost equity from anti-Black housing, transportation, and business policy. Slavery, Jim Crow segregation, anti-Black practices like redlining, and other discriminatory public policies in criminal justice and education have robbed Black Americans of the opportunities to build wealth (defined as assets minus debt) afforded to their white peers.
- Bootstrapping isn't going to erase racial wealth divides. As economists William "Sandy" Darity and Darrick Hamilton point out in their 2018 report, *What We Get Wrong About Closing the Wealth Gap*, "Blacks cannot close the racial wealth gap by changing their individual behavior –i.e. by assuming more 'personal responsibility' or acquiring the portfolio management insights associated with '[financial] literacy.'" In fact, white high school dropouts have more wealth than Black college graduates. Moreover, the racial wealth gap did not result from a lack of labor. Rather, it came from a lack of financial capital.
- Not only do racial wealth disparities reveal fallacies in the American Dream, the financial and social consequences are significant and wide-ranging. Wealth is positively correlated with better health,

educational, and economic outcomes. Furthermore, assets from homes, stocks, bonds, and retirement savings provide a financial safety net for the inevitable shocks to the economy and personal finances that happen throughout a person's lifespan.

-Rayshawn Ray & Andre M. Perry

I, as a white person, want to help combat racism. How and where do I start?

- Here are some key first steps White people can take to work effectively toward change, says [Paul Kivel](#), an activist and author of "Uprooting Racism: How White People can Work for Racial Justice."

- **Educate yourself.** This step is often overlooked but is crucial in understanding issues of race. Turn to books, articles, movies and other resources to deepen your understanding of systemic racism. Listen to what people of color, including members of Black Lives Matter, Showing Up for Racial Justice and immigrant and Native American communities, are saying.

But do not just rely on people of color to do your education for you, Kivel says.

"People of color are organizing for their lives and defending their communities and they've often been forced to do a lot of emotional work for White people," he says. "This is a time for us to not put that burden on them."

- **Start conversations.** Initiate discussions about racism with your partner, family members, friends, children and coworkers. Share how you feel, what makes you upset and invite others to give their take. Together, try to pinpoint how racism plays out in your communities and what you can do about it. And if you witness someone saying or doing something racist, speak up.

"Silence is a form of complicity," Kivel says. "It's colluding with the status quo, pretending that nothing is really wrong."

The more awareness we help bring to an issue, he says, the "more we understand that we're very much in the middle of this system of oppression, not on the outskirts looking in."

- **Get involved in your community.** Take action by showing up to city council and school board meetings, addressing policies in your workplace or working with groups to address gentrification and housing segregation by lobbying officials to create more affordable housing and put in renters' protections.

Fighting structural racism benefits everyone, Kivel says.

"I think very often, as White people, we think that we need to save people of color or do this to help them," Kivel says. "We need to understand that this is about our mutual interests, that our society is being torn apart by racism and that we all have a stake in building the communities that we want to live in."

-Christina Maxouris, CNN

Should I use the term Black or African American?

- Whether someone identifies themselves as Black or African American is a matter of personal choice. Black is becoming more common because not all people who are Black identify as African American. There are Black Americans who are unable to trace their lineage to a specific African country or they do not relate to African culture. Additionally, there are Black Americans whose lineage traces back to countries outside of the African continent. Both are commonly used, but ultimately it is a matter of personal choice how someone prefers to identify.

I am not a racist, but I believe All Lives Matter. Is that so wrong?

- The Black Lives Matter movement is not about one human life being valued over any other human life. It's about addressing an urgent problem of racial injustice in our country. One analogy that has been used is imagining everyone has a house. Your friend's house is on fire. Does your house, and your friend's house, and your brother's house and your sister's house matter? Yes. All of the houses matter. But at that moment your friend's house is on fire and needs saving immediately.

I don't see color. Why do I have to get involved?

- Racism is deeply rooted in our country's foundation. People receive different privileges based on their race, and that is never easy to recognize. The goal is for people to go beyond "not being a racist" and go a step further to becoming an "anti-racist". Someone who is an anti-racist actively promotes racial justice. They speak up when racist comments are made. They are actively learning through reading and listening about injustices which exist in the country and they are learning to solve them.

What is white privilege?

- It's the level of societal advantage that comes with being seen as the norm in America, automatically conferred irrespective of wealth, gender or other factors. It makes life smoother, but it's something you would barely notice unless it were suddenly taken away — or unless it had never applied to you in the first place.
- In 1988, the professor Peggy McIntosh used the paper *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* to describe it as a set of unearned assets that a white person in America can count on cashing in each day but to which they remain largely oblivious. The concept has been percolating in academic circles ever since and is approaching broad usage among young people on the political left. Yet as *Post* reporter Janell Ross noted earlier this week, it's also a term that many Americans "instinctively don't trust or believe to be real," despite reams of evidence to the contrary. Black children— 4-year-olds! — comprise 18 percent of preschool enrollment but are given nearly nearly 50 percent of all out-of-school suspensions. Job applicants with white-sounding names are 50 percent more likely to get called in for an interview. Black defendants are at least 30 percent more likely to be imprisoned than white defendants for the same crime.

Is it ok to be colorblind?

- No, it is not ok to be color blind. Although the roots of not seeing color were well intentioned, it leaves people without the language to discuss race and examine their own bias. Color blindness relies on the concept that race-based differences don't matter, and ignores the realities of systemic racism. People may say they don't have a racist bone in their body, and they don't care if you're white, black, purple, or blue, etc. In fact, they say, they're "color blind"—meaning, they don't even see race. And that refusal to see it often goes hand-in-hand with an urgent desire to stop discussing racial disparities as soon as possible.
- Perhaps most notably, colorblindness erases one's racial/ethnic pride. Often, to be colorblind is to accept everyone regardless of skin color — as long as they act normal. The problem is that, in a world controlled socially by white culture for so long, white has become synonymous with "normal." Thus, to act normal is to act white. Furthermore, those whose skin color is attached to a particular culture with its own norms, dialects, and aesthetics are deemed abnormal or purposefully drawing attention to their collective difference. Colorblindness, then, is another way to express the desire for those of all races to assimilate to the norm: whiteness.
- So, color blind society can enable people — often inadvertently — to ignore discriminatory aspects of society and promote an expectation for all Americans to assimilate to white American norms.

- Erec Smith

What about Black on Black crime?

- This may seem like an innocent question, but to many people it sounds loaded. If the only time someone asks this is when African Americans protest police violence, it sounds like a “dog whistle” — a coded message among bigots ignoring that White-on-White crime also takes an enormous toll on law enforcement.
- But let’s assume this question is sincere.
- First, it’s common for victims and perpetrators of violence to share a race. The [2018 National Crime Victimization Survey](#), which tabulates numerous crimes, including assault, burglary and rape (but not murder), found that in crimes where Whites were victims, the offender was White 62.1% of the time. When Blacks were victims, the offender was Black 70.3% of the time.
- The FBI’s [2018 numbers for homicides](#) with a single killer and a single victim, which are not comprehensive, show a similar breakdown. Roughly 81% of White homicide victims that year were killed by another White person, while with almost 89% of African American victims, the killer was Black.

-Elliott McLaughlin, CNN

Is it ok to talk about race?

- Yes! We must talk, we must understand and we have to get better at it every day. It is important to overcome the fear of "getting it wrong" or "saying the wrong thing". We cannot remain silent because silence equals complicity. Let’s talk. Let’s overcome the silence. Let’s resist the urge to politicize the issue of racism. This is not a conservative or liberal issue. This is a human rights issue. This is a medical issue. Racism is a public health crisis destroying our citizens. We don’t need your perfection in these conversations. We need your action.

-Gary W. Stewart, M.D.

What is Black Lives Matter?

- A political movement to address systemic and state violence against African Americans. Per the Black Lives Matter organizers: “In 2013, three radical Black organizers—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—created a Black-centered political will and movement building project called #BlackLivesMatter. It was in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murderer, George Zimmerman. The project is now a member-led global network of more than 40 chapters. [Black Lives Matter] members organize and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.”

SOURCE: Black Lives Matter, “Herstory”

What is a microaggression?

- Microaggressions are defined as the everyday, subtle, intentional — and oftentimes unintentional — interactions or behaviors that communicate some sort of bias toward historically marginalized groups.
- The difference between microaggressions and overt discrimination or macroaggressions, is that people who commit microaggressions might not even be aware of them.
- Someone commenting on how well an Asian American speaks English, which presumes the Asian American was not born here, is one example of a microaggression. Presuming that a black person is dangerous or violent is another example. A common experience that black men talk about is being followed around in stores or getting on an elevator and having people move away and grab their purses or their wallets.
- Oftentimes, people don't even realize that they're doing those sorts of things. And in fact, if you were to stop them and say, 'Why did you just move?' They would deny it because they don't recognize that their behaviors communicate their racial biases.

-Dr. Kevin Nadal

Isn't affirmative action by its definition racist?

- According to many experts, the answer is no.
- Affirmative action refers to a set of policies and laws that focus on improving opportunities for groups of people, like women and minorities. It gives these historically marginalized groups a seat at the table, so to speak.
- “Affirmative action is by definition ANTI-racist,” OiYan Poon, an affiliate faculty member in the Higher Education Leadership program at Colorado State University, told CNN in an email interview.
- Poon, whose research focuses on racial inequalities in college access, points to the term’s origins to explain why. The term dates back to 1961, when President John F. Kennedy used it in an executive order which created the Council on Equal Opportunity. Its goal was to ensure that federal contractors hire people regardless of race, creed, color or national origin.
- “By the 1970s, these affirmative action efforts went from a more passive non-discrimination position to a more active form of policy and practice to address contemporary realities of racism,” Poon says.
- Supporters of affirmative action say it levels the playing field and creates a more diverse workforce or student body, something vital in a multiracial country and for businesses that compete in a global marketplace.
- Risa Lieberwitz, a professor of Labor and Employment Law at Cornell University, says affirmative action is a response to the United States’ “historically excluding people of color from all sorts of societal institutions, decade after decade.”
- Affirmative action doesn’t necessarily mean preferential treatment — it’s more of a good faith effort to recruit qualified candidates of color — and even White women.

—Saba Hamedy, CNN

How do you find out about your own race?

How do you walk a step in another's shoes?