

End of Chapter Questions

Childhood in White

Chapter 1 – What Wasn't Said:

What stereotypes about people of another race do you remember hearing and believing as a child? Were you ever encouraged to question stereotypes?

Chapter 2 – Family Values:

What values and admonitions did you learn in your family? Think about education, work, lifestyle, money, expression of emotions, and so forth. Try making a list of ten principles, values, and unspoken beliefs. Siblings and cousins can be good resources for thinking about this. Now consider what conclusions you drew about people who did not appear to follow your family's belief system.

Chapter 3 – Race Versus Class:

Class is determined by income, wealth (assets), education, and profession. Betsy Leondar-Wright, program director at Class Action, suggests these categories as a way of thinking about class:

Poverty

Working Class

Lower-Middle Class

Professional Middle Class

Upper-Middle Class

Owning Class

How would you characterize your parents' class? Your grandparents' class? Your class as a child? Your class now? What messages did you get about race in each?

Chapter 4 – Optimism:

What were some of the major economic, political, demographic, and pop culture trends from ten years before your birth until age twenty? How did they show up in your life? How do you think they influenced your beliefs?

Chapter 5 – Within the Walls:

How connected to or disconnected from the larger world was your family, your school, your town? How much did you understand about conflict and struggle in your world or beyond? How did you make sense of people who had material wealth and people who didn't? What was your family's attitude about the people in power?

Midlife Wake-Up Calls

Chapter 6 – From Confusion to Shock:

The late historian Ronald Takaki referred to the history taught in American schools as “The Master Narrative”, the version of history told by Americans of Anglo descent. Think about what you did not study. Did you learn about Lincoln's views on enslaved black people? Anti-immigration laws of the nineteenth century? America's laws regarding who could and could not gain citizenship? The Native Americans who had once lived on your town's or school's land?

Chapter 7 – The GI Bill:

Have you ever uncovered a family secret or piece of information about a person or place that countered your previous perception? Once you learned the new information, were you able to look back and see clues that had been there all along but that you didn't recognize as evidence of a narrative you didn't yet know about?

Chapter 8 – Racial Categories:

How have you understood racial difference? In terms of biology? Culture? Have you given it much thought? Why or why not?

Chapter 9 – White Superiority:

Prior to reading this chapter, what did you know about the history of naming the races? How do you now feel about the term “Caucasian”?

Chapter 10 – The Melting Pot:

Think about your ethnic heritage. If you are white and know little about it, why do you think that is? Do some ethnicities in your mix get played up and some down? What family stories have held fast through the generations? How have they shaped your understanding of America as a meritocracy – a society in which everyone succeeds or fails on their own merits?

Chapter 11 – Headwinds and Tailwinds:

Consider each of these tangible and intangible aspects of your life: work, sense of belonging, social connections, choice, education, healthy food, legal protection, housing, transportation, medical care. How easy or hard has it been for you to attain each?

Why Didn't I Wake Up Sooner?

Chapter 12 – Icebergs:

Think of a time you grossly misinterpreted a person (of any race) or situation. What information was missing that allowed you to draw incorrect conclusions? What in your belief system contributed to your misinterpretation?

Chapter 13 – Invisibility:

Watch parts 1 and 2 of “True Colors” online, a total of eighteen minutes. (See Notes on Sources for the URL.) Write ten words that describe how Glenn (black) is treated. Write ten words for how John (white) is treated. Which customer service experience feels more like yours?

Chapter 14 – Zap!:

Have you ever had anyone doubt, dismiss, or minimize an experience that was formative for you? How did it feel? How did it affect your feelings about that person?

Chapter 15 – The Whole Story:

Think of a historical event in American history, perhaps the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the arrival of the Statue of Liberty, or any one of the wars Americans have fought. Where have you learned what you know about this event? Whose perspective did you learn? If you went in search of a fuller story, whose viewpoint would you seek?

Chapter 16 – Logos and Stereotypes:

What have you filed away? Create a column that contains these labels: African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Jews, Latinos, Muslims, Whites. Next to each, quickly write at least 5 stereotypes that come to mind for each. Do not pause, censor, or correct; rather, let emerge what will. Now, look at what you've written. Does it surprise you? If you are white, do you have any stereotypes for whites? Why do you think this is?

Rethinking Key Concepts

Chapter 17 – My Good People:

How would you complete this sentence? I never thought I could perpetuate racism because I am _____ and I believe _____.

Chapter 18 – Color Blind:

If both of your parents are white, imagine just one of them being a person of color. Rethink your life from birth to the present. How would your race have influenced your experiences and your outcomes?

Chapter 19 – My Good Luck:

Have you ever benefited from family connections and/or family funds to further your career? Get into a school? Attain housing? From which racial group were those family connections?

Chapter 20 – My Robin Hood Syndrome:

If you were to be given \$100,000 and told to give it to one charity, which one would you pick? What are the races of the organization's three top executives? What race is the chair of the board?

Twenty-Five Years Of Tossing And Turning

Chapter 21 Straddling Two Worlds:

Think of different groups of people in your life – your family, your friends, your coworkers, and so on. For each of these groups or contexts, think about whether you feel like an insider or outsider and how that status affects your desire to spend time with the group.

Chapter 22 – Why Do I Always End Up With White People?:

Have you tried to form relationships across racial lines? How have they worked out? If they didn't get very far, how did you explain that to yourself?

Chapter 23 – Diversity Training:

Think about five rules from the "rule book" of social interaction that you grew up with. For each rule, can you imagine how it interferes with honest, cross-cultural dialogue, given what you've learned in this book or from other sources?

Chapter 24 – Everyone Is Different; Everyone Belongs:

Make a list of all the factors that you believe contributed to your own achievement as a student. How do you think being a white person or a person of color influenced each of those factors?

Chapter 25 – Belonging:

Did you or your parents ever ask for specific teachers or classroom placement? Did you or your parents ever volunteer for a school role such as room parent or committee chair? How might you navigate those situations differently now? List three specific ways for a white parent both to be involved and to be inclusive of parents of color.

Chapter 26 – Surviving Versus Thriving:

Think about a time when you were treated unfairly. What do you recall of your emotions (e.g., anger, resentment, anxiety) and your physical state (e.g., elevated heart rate, stomach clenching, sweating)? How did you respond to the unfair treatment?

Chapter 27 – Living Into Expectations:

Can you recall your childhood expectations of how you'd fare in school? How did you imagine your adult life would be? Where did you get these ideas? Think about lifestyle, family, and work. How close is your life to those of your parents and other adults you knew? How much do you think race influenced your life vision and outcome? How much do you think class influenced your life vision and outcome?

Chapter 28 – I Am The Elephant:

Can you recall a time when you knew there was an elephant in the room and you only discovered what it was later? Once you've recalled that time, make a list of the feelings you experienced. How did you feel once you got the full story and the elephant was exposed?

Leaving My Comfort Zone

Chapter 29 – Intent and Impact:

Think of a time when you hurt someone's feelings without intending to. Was your impulse to defend yourself? If so, why do you think you that urge to defend your intention felt so important? If you eventually shifted from focusing on your intent to focusing on the impact of your words or actions, what inspired you to do so? What was ultimately required to heal the rift?

Chapter 30 – Feelings And The Culture Of Niceness:

What lessons were you taught about crying? Do you feel differently if you see a man, woman, or child crying? For whom do you tend to feel empathy? For whom do you tend to feel judgment? Why?

Chapter 31 – Courageous Conversations:

Make a deal with someone you trust in order to practice giving and getting honest feedback. Set your own guidelines, such as: If I ask your opinion, you will give me an honest answer, even if you know it might hurt, or, Feel free to gently point out to me [name one of your flaws] when I do it so that I can increase my awareness of when and where I do it. Keep in mind the words of pastor Warren Wiersbe, “Truth without love is brutality, and love without truth is hypocrisy.”

Chapter 32 – Getting Over Myself:

How do you want people to see you? List five adjectives you’d hope people would use. What behaviors do you employ to convey this image? How would admitting ignorance or wrongdoing, no matter how unintentional, challenge your desired image?

Chapter 33 – Perception And Fear:

Imagine a country inhabited by two groups of people. The groups can’t stand each other. This is equal-opportunity prejudice. Now imagine that your group runs the bank, the government, the schools, the hospitals, and the media. Your group has the power to make your opinions the dominant ones while creating policies and practices that marginalize the other group. List the feelings and thoughts that might develop by being a part of the group in power. Then list the feelings and thoughts that might develop by being a part of the group not in power.

Inner Work

Chapter 34 – Becoming Multicultural:

Think of a major change you’ve made in your life – a marriage, a divorce, a move, a new job, a lost job. List the strengths and skills you lost as a result of the change. List the strengths and skills you gained.

Chapter 35 – If Only You’d Be More Like Me:

Can you make a list of the ways in which America’s dominant culture has left an imprint on you? I could not have created much of a list before this journey. If you have trouble making one, you’re not alone!

Chapter 36 – The Dominant White Culture:

Take a look at the continuums below. The qualities on the left are often associated with the dominant white culture. Folks working to break patterns that maintain racism notice that thinking and acting in ways closer to the right side of the continuum can be useful in addressing racial healing. Take a minute to place yourself along each line. You may notice that you move more to the left or right depending on your environment. What is it that causes you to move one way or the other?

I don't like to rock the boat.	I'm comfortable giving/getting honest feedback.
I mostly value intellect (data, facts).	I mostly value intuition (emotion, senses).
I choose comfort.	I tolerate or embrace discomfort as a way to grow.
I feel a sense of urgency and a need to fix things.	I like to slow down and see how conversations/initiatives unfold.
I'm thick skinned and competitive.	I'm able to be vulnerable and cooperative.
I tend to judge people who feel differently.	I tend to be curious about other people's perspectives.
I prefer absolutes.	I'm comfortable with ambiguity.
I value outcomes and finished products.	I value process.
I tend to blame others when tension erupts.	I tend to reflect on my own role when tension erupts.
I care most about individual status.	I care most about group functionality.

Chapter 37 – Boxes and Ladders:

Pick a six-hour period in which you commit to noticing your tendency to box or rank a person or idea. Make a note about each incident, be it a person on the bus, a family member, a colleague, or a person in the media. At the end of your observation period, explore one incident in which you boxed and ranked a person with whom you were interacting. Does your conscious mind agree with your initial judgment? What, if anything, do you think you could have learned had you replaced judgment with curiosity in that situation?

Chapter 38 – The Rugged Individual:

What did you learn about self-sufficiency and independence? How do you feel when you need to ask someone for help?

Chapter 39 – Equality Starts With Equity:

Which of the following special-by-race programs have benefited you in your life? How?

- white only or white dominated neighborhood
- white only or white dominated country club
- other types of white only or white dominated social clubs
- legacy at a private school
- legacy at an institution of higher education
- lending rates for white people

Chapter 40 – Bull In A China Shop:

Make a list of five conversation starters that have nothing to do with identifying a person by where they're from, what they do for work, or any other sorting and ranking criteria. For example, think about how you'd feel asking or being asked, "So, what was the most interesting thing that happened in your day today?"

Outer Work

Chapter 41 – From Bystander To Ally:

What might prevent you from stepping out of the bystander role and into the ally role? Make a list of the reasons. What do you notice as you look at this list? What might you do to overcome the obstacles you've listed?

Chapter 42 – Solidarity And Accountability:

Think of an issue in your own community (town, school, workplace, religious organization) that has been raised by people of color. How would you approach people who are focused on the problem? How would you go about being in solidarity with them? What could you offer?

Chapter 43 – From Tolerance To Engagement:

Have you ever been to an event that celebrated diversity? What did you learn about the various cultures' belief systems? Did the event give you insight to how a person from that culture might feel, given their cultural values and habits, if they tried to engage in an organization steeped in values and habits from the dominant white culture?

Chapter 44 – Listening:

Challenge yourself in the next conversation you're part of to ask more questions than you typically would and refrain from offering your own opinion. Take note of where the conversation goes.

Chapter 45 – Normalizing Race Talk:

Make a list of five ways to shut a conversation down. Next make a list of five ways to keep a conversation going.



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