

18 Things White People Should Know And/or Do Before Discussing Race

“Discourse about racism is not meant to stir up feelings of guilt, it is meant to drive people to action against injustice.”

Discussions about racism should be all-inclusive and open to people of all skin colors. However, to put it simply, sometimes White people [lack the experience or education](#) that can provide a rudimentary foundation from which a productive conversation can be built. This is not necessarily the fault of the individual, but pervasive myths and misinformation have dominated mainstream racial discourse and often times, the important issues are never highlighted. For that reason, [The Frisky](#) has decided to publish this handy list that has some basic rules and information to better prepare anyone for a worthwhile discussion about racism. (See [SensitivitySummit.com](#).)

1. It is uncomfortable to talk about racism. It is more uncomfortable to live it.
2. “Colorblindness” is a cop-out. The statements “but I don’t see color” or “I never care about color” do not help to build a case against systemic racism. Try being the only White person in an environment. You will notice color then.
3. Oprah’s success does not mean the end of racism. The singular success of a Black man or woman (i.e. Oprah, or Tiger Woods, or [President Obama](#)) is never a valid argument against the existence of racism. By this logic, the success of Frederick Douglass or Amanda America Dickson during the 19th century would be grounds for disproving slavery.
4. Reverse racism is BS, but prejudice is not. Until people of color colonize, dominate and enslave the populations of the planet in the name of “superiority,” create standards of beauty based on their own colored definition, enact a system where only [People of Color](#) benefit on a large-scale, and finally pretend like said system no longer exists, there is no such thing as reverse racism. Prejudice is in all of us*, but prejudice employed as a governing structure is something different.

(*Note: The human mind was created to make choices, i.e., to discriminate between up and down, in and out, black and white. Therefore, we must be aware of our tendency to use our discretionary abilities in order to marginalize and repress people with whom we differ. We need to constantly see to it that we advocate for [pluralism](#) and against [tribalism](#) in the interest of justice and fairness, which is the teaching of [Guru Nanak](#).)

5. America has not “gotten over” its race-related problems. In American History class you learned about slavery and Jim Crow, but sadly you were taught that figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks eradicated an entire 200-year history of oppression, discrimination and segregation. Your history teachers and books tried close the race chapter on a high note, however the ongoing history of America’s systemic racism cannot be simply wrapped up and decorated with a “now we all are equal” bow.

6. Google is your best friend. Search: Black/White wealth gap, redlining, “White flight,” subprime mortgages and Black families, discriminatory sentencing practices, occupational overcrowding, workplace discrimination, employment discrimination, mandatory minimum sentences and in-school segregation to start. Here are some highlights:

(a) The [median wealth gap difference](#) between a White family and a Black family is \$80,000.

(b) 1 in 9 Black children [has an incarcerated parent](#) compared to 1 in 57 White children.

(c) A White man who has been to jail [is still more likely to get a job](#) than a Black man who hasn’t.

7. Then read some more. Google: Black Wall Street, Sundown towns, eugenics and forced sterilization, and Black voting prohibition.

8. Buy and read a book from a Black author. Some recommendations: W.E.B Dubois, James Baldwin, Frederick Douglass, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Ralph Ellison, Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston would be a great start.

9. Realize that segregation is still rampant. Step outside and take a look around your neighborhood. Lacking people of color much? That

is called segregation. It is not by chance, though sometimes by choice. (Refer to “redlining” Google search.)

(a) About your neighborhood again: Displacing people of color much? That is called gentrification.

(b) Think about the schools you went to and the classes you had. Not too many minorities in either? (Refer to school segregation/in-school segregation.)

10. Programs or initiatives that target systemic racism are not “charity.” We do not refer to the 200 years of free labor provided by enslaved Blacks as charity. Or the Black property stolen by Whites during the decades of state-supported terrorism? Or, say, the unfair banking practices that have completely decimated the Black middle class through foreclosures (refer to subprime mortgages and Black families Google search)?

11. Black on Black crime does not exist. There are countless White people committing crimes against White people, but “White-on-White crime” is strangely absent from the rhetoric reporting everything from elementary school shootings to world wars. Why should crimes committed by and against people of color be labeled any differently?

12. White people will not become the minority in America in the next 20 years. “Whites” were originally Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs). The definition of “White,” as a racial classification, has evolved to include “Whiter-skinned” minority groups who were historically discriminated against, barred from “Whiteness” and thus had little access to opportunity. Some examples: Italians and the Irish (who were frequently referred to as n***ers in the 1800’s), Jewish people and more recently Hispanic (George Zimmerman) and Armenian minority groups. Such evolutions, however, always exclude Blacks.

13. Hip-hop culture is no more dysfunctional than Wall Street culture. At its worst, commercial “Black culture” is a raw reflection of broader society. The caricatured imagery of drugs, money, and women are headlined most prominently by Wall Street, politicians, and media moguls, but this reality never comes to reflect on White people. America spends more on weaponry than the most of the rest of the world combined but somehow it is the “violence” of hip-hop that is an exclusive pathology.

14. Black people are angry about racism, and they have every right to be. Anger is a legitimate and justified response to years of injustice and invisibility.

15. There are poor White people, but racism and discrimination still exists. The plight of the poor White Midwest always makes a convenient appearance to deflect any perceived accusation of privilege or to derail conversations of racism. Racist American policy was never about securing the success of all White people, but rather about legalizing the disenfranchisement of Blacks and other people of color.

16. Silence does nothing. Blank stares and silence do not further this difficult but necessary conversation.

17. White guilt is worthless, but White action isn't. One of the most immediate responses to racial discourse is that the effort is all about making White people feel guilty. **Discourse about racism is not meant to stir up feelings of guilt, it is meant to drive people to action against injustice.** During the times of slavery and the era of the Civil Rights Movement, both Black and White people played and continue to play instrumental roles in Black advancement.

18. Black people are not obligated to answer the "Well, what do we do about it?" question. Though many of us do and are not heard. The call for reparations in the form of "[Baby Bonds](#)" is a great idea. So is [desegregating our classrooms](#) and closing the [school-to-prison pipeline](#). These courageous voices are speaking very loudly –

it is time to start listening. --

[Tiffanie Drayton and Joshua McCarther](#), June 12, 2014.