

Talking About Race

Being Antiracist

To create an equal society, we must commit to making unbiased choices and being antiracist in all aspects of our lives.

Topics

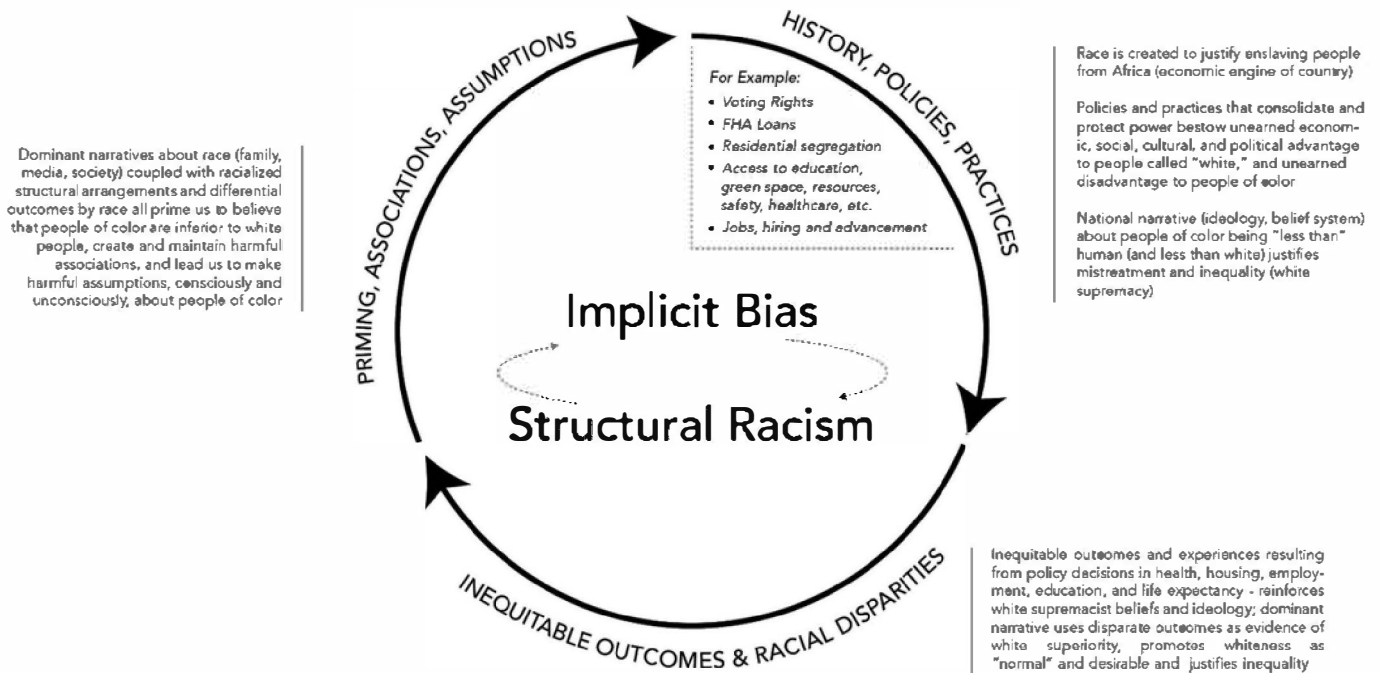


Race does not biologically exist, yet how we identify with race is so powerful, it influences our experiences and shapes our lives. In a society that privileges white people and whiteness, racist ideas are considered normal throughout our media, culture, social systems, and institutions. Historically, racist views justified the unfair treatment and oppression of people of color (including enslavement, segregation,

internment, etc.). We can be led to believe that racism is only about individual mindsets and actions, yet racist policies also contribute to our polarization. While individual choices are damaging, racist ideas in policy have a wide-spread impact by threatening the equity of our systems and the fairness of our institutions. To create an equal society, we must commit to making unbiased choices and being antiracist in all aspects of our lives.

Being antiracist is fighting against racism. Racism takes several forms and works most often in tandem with at least one other form to reinforce racist ideas, behavior, and policy. Types of racism are:

- **Individual racism** refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism in conscious and unconscious ways. The U.S. cultural narrative about racism typically focuses on individual racism and fails to recognize systemic racism.
Examples include believing in the superiority of white people, not hiring a person of color because “something doesn’t feel right,” or telling a racist joke.
- **Interpersonal racism** occurs between individuals. These are public expressions of racism, often involving slurs, biases, or hateful words or actions.
- **Institutional racism** occurs in an organization. These are discriminatory treatments, unfair policies, or biased practices based on race that result in inequitable outcomes for whites over people of color and extend considerably beyond prejudice. These institutional policies often never mention any racial group, but the intent is to create advantages.
Example: A school system where students of color are more frequently distributed into the most crowded classrooms and underfunded schools and out of the higher-resourced schools.
- **Structural racism** is the overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society. These systems give privileges to white people resulting in disadvantages to people of color.
Example: Stereotypes of people of color as criminals in mainstream movies and media.



"Implicit Bias and Structural Racialization," By Kathleen Osta & Hugh Vasquez, National Equity Project. [Download full PDF](#)



No one is born racist or antiracist; these result from the choices we make.

Being antiracist results from a conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily. These choices require ongoing self-awareness and self-reflection as we move through life. In the absence of making antiracist choices, we (un)consciously uphold aspects of white supremacy, white-dominant culture, and unequal institutions and society. Being racist or antiracist is not about who you are; it is about what you do.

"To be antiracist is a radical choice in the face of history, requiring a radical reorientation of our consciousness."

Ibram Kendi*"How to be an Antiracist"*

The above media is provided by YouTube

Being Antiracist at the Individual and Interpersonal Level

When we choose to be antiracist, we become actively conscious about race and racism *and* take actions to end racial inequities in our daily lives. Being antiracist is believing that racism is everyone's problem, and we all have a role to play in stopping it. In "[The Racial Healing Handbook](#) [↗](#)," Dr. Anneliese A. Singh reminds us of the importance of being purposeful: "*You need the intentional mindset of **Yep, this racism thing is everyone's problem-including mine, and I'm going to do something about it.***"

Being antiracist is different for white people than it is for people of color. For white people, being antiracist evolves with their racial identity development. They must

acknowledge and understand their privilege, work to change their internalized racism, and interrupt racism when they see it. For people of color, it means recognizing how race and racism have been internalized, and whether it has been applied to other people of color.

All racial groups struggle under white supremacy. People of color groups are not always united in solidarity. People of color can act by challenging internalized white supremacy and interrupting patterns of prejudice against other racial groups. For everyone, it is an ongoing practice and process.

[As a White Person or a Person of Color, Read More About Becoming Antiracist](#)

Stop and Think!

Why do you want to be antiracist? Considering the breadth and depth of racism, committing to being antiracist may feel overwhelming yet small choices made daily can add up to big changes. Reflect on choices you make in your daily life (i.e., who you build relationships with, what media you follow, where you shop). How do these choices reflect being antiracist?

A Questioning Frame of Mind

A commitment to being antiracist manifests in our choices. When we encounter interpersonal racism, whether obvious or covert, there are ways to respond and interrupt it. Asking questions is a powerful tool to seek clarity or offer a new

perspective. Below are some suggestions to use in conversations when racist behavior occurs:

- Seek clarity: “Tell me more about _____.”
- Offer an alternative perspective: “Have you ever considered _____.”
- Speak your truth: “I don’t see it the way you do. I see it as _____.”
- Find common ground: “We don’t agree on _____ but we can agree on _____.”
- Give yourself the time and space you need: “Could we revisit the conversation about _____ tomorrow.”
- Set boundaries. “Please do not say _____ again to me or around me.


As you practice, take note of your responses and ask: *How am I processing the experience? What body sensations do I have? What is my emotional reaction?* Notice what triggers your response and how it manifests in your body.

Another practical step is to uncover your own [bias](#). In the video below, Verna Myers talks about acknowledging your biases in her Ted Talk:

The above media is provided by YouTube

Being antiracist on the individual and interpersonal levels is only part of the work. To end racism, we must also work to dismantle racist policies at the structural and institutional levels.

Example of Being Antiracist at the Institutional Level

Institutional racism is the policies and practices within institutions that benefit white people to the disadvantage of people of color. An example of institutional racism is how children of color are treated within the U.S. education system. On average, [children of color are disciplined more harshly](#)  than their white peers. They are also less likely to be identified as gifted and have less access to quality teachers. Racism in schools can and does have severe consequences for students and our future.

When I say antiracist education, I am talking about equipping students, parents, and teachers with the tools needed to combat racism and ethnic

discrimination, and to find ways to build a society that includes all people on an equal footing.

Enid Lee

Antiracist education is a theory of learning and action to help us do the important work of dismantling racism in schools. It explicitly highlights, critiques, and challenges institutional racism. It addresses how racist beliefs and ideologies structure one-on-one interactions and personal relationships. It also examines and challenges how institutions support and maintain disadvantages and advantages along racial lines.

Antiracist education, while considering class, race, and gender inequity, places race at the center of its analysis. Focusing on race exposes direct links to unequal power, a system of oppression and privilege, and institutional practices.

One of the early formulations of antiracist education was developed by social science researchers, Carol Tator and Frances Henry, in Canada. It lists nine key traits.



Infographic © NMAAHC. Data source: [“Multicultural Education vs Anti-Racist Education: The Debate in Canada”](#), Social Education 58(6), 1994, pp. 354-358. National Council for the Social Studies.

Stop and Think!

What do the elements of learning listed above mean to you?

Developing routines to make antiracist choices is a daily commitment that must be carried out with intention. The continued efforts of each of us individually can add up to a lasting change in our society. Since racism operates at multiple levels, we have to make antiracist choices at the various levels - individual, interpersonal, and

institutional - to eradicate racism from the structures and fabric of our society. In “How to Be an Antiracist,” Dr. Ibram Kendi writes, “[We must] believe in the possibility that we can strive to be antiracist from this day forward. Believe in the possibility that we can transform our societies to be antiracist from this day forward. Racist power is not godly. Racist policies are not indestructible. Racial inequities are not inevitable. Racist ideas are not natural to the human mind.”

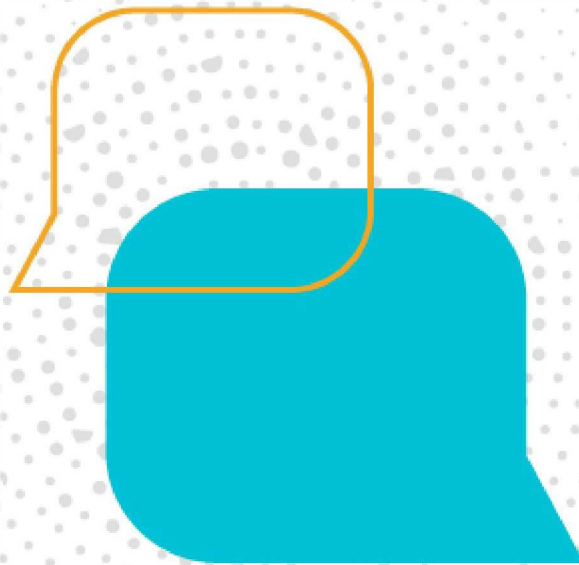
Take a moment to reflect



Let's Think

- How have racist ideas impacted your daily life? Reflect and process - you may choose to sit in quiet reflection or write in your journal.

- **EDUCATORS:** Read [“The Urgent Need for Anti-Racist Education”](#), by Christina Torres. She writes that antiracist education has an important role to play in fighting against hatred and violence. What benefits do you think could result from having discussions with young people about current events involving race and racism?



Let's Talk

- The Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University contends that racist policies fuel racist beliefs and behaviors and keep us divided in society.
- By yourself, divide two pieces of paper into 4 sections. Write the following categories, one in each section, on the page: Education, Healthcare Treatment, Neighborhoods/Housing, Criminal Justice. Do this for both pages.
- On the first sheet, jot down 2-3 racial groups of people *you think get the best service/experience/outcomes* in America for each category. You can repeat groups.

- On the second sheet, jot down 2-3 racial groups of people *you think* get *the worst* service/experience/outcomes in America for each category. You can repeat groups.
- Now, with a partner discuss what **policies**, old and newer, you believe might account for these groups' experiences.
- With your partner, return to each racial group you've listed, one at a time. Search the internet, look up the racial group, one of the four categories, and the word "policy" (limit your search to U.S. policies and seek out fact-based sources). Browse through the results for things that strike you.


Discuss with your partner:

- Was it easy or difficult to find useful information on policies in these categories having to do with race? Why do you think that was?
- For those racial groups that you thought had the best service/experience/outcomes, were you able to identify specific policies that helped them? Why yes? Or why not?
- How do you think policies can be hidden or difficult to see in operation?
- What did you discover that was new to you?
- Were you wrong about anything you thought? How did you find out?
- Was there anything uncomfortable about this exercise? Why yes? Or why not?
- How can our learning about policies, racial groups, and outcomes help support anti-racism efforts?



Let's Act

Watch these two videos on Implicit Bias:

- How can you hang out authentically with folks of some common interest, across racial lines?
- **EDUCATORS:** Consider your current classroom or academic space. What one small shift can you do to strive to be more antiracist?
- Visit the “[Antiracism and America](#) ” web series developed by American University’s Antiracist Research and Policy Center and The Guardian news outlet.
- Pick a story to read. As you reflect on the story, think about what you learned that was new, how the story made you feel, how race shaped the experience of the storyteller and your response. You may choose to process this mentally, with a friend or in writing.



Why Us, Why Now?

Since the opening of the museum, the number one question people ask us is how to talk about race. In 2014, we launched our signature program, “Let’s Talk! Teaching Race in the Classroom.” Every year we’ve learned, reflected, and refined the program content – always growing and striving to do better.

Information about the Education Platform

Generously supported by

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist>



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