

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

THIS  
BOOK  
IS  
ANTI-  
RACIST

20 LESSONS ON HOW TO WAKE UP,  
TAKE ACTION AND DO THE WORK

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## WAKING UP: UNDERSTANDING AND GROWING INTO MY IDENTITIES

- 10 Chapter 1: Who Am I?
- 18 Chapter 2: What Are My Social Identities?
- 24 Chapter 3: What Is Race? What Is Ethnicity?
- 30 Chapter 4: What Is Racism? (Personal)
- 36 Chapter 5: What Is Racism? (Institutional)

---

## OPENING THE WINDOW: MAKING SENSE OF THE WORLD

- 46 Chapter 6: Prejudice Is Personal
- 54 Chapter 7: The History We Carry
- 62 Chapter 8: Knowing Our History
- 74 Chapter 9: We Are Our History

---

## CHOOSING MY PATH: TAKING ACTION AND RESPONDING TO RACISM

- 86 Chapter 10: Disrupt!
- 94 Chapter 11: Take Action!
- 98 Chapter 12: Interrupt!
- 106 Chapter 13: Solidarity
- 112 Chapter 14: Calling In or Calling Out?

---

## HOLDING THE DOOR OPEN: WORKING IN SOLIDARITY AGAINST RACISM

- 120 Chapter 15: Spending That Privilege
- 126 Chapter 16: Allyship
- 132 Chapters 17: Building Relationships
- 138 Chapter 18: Love Yourself
- 142 Chapter 19: How We Grow
- 146 Chapter 20: Our Freedom



### AUTHOR'S NOTE

*You will notice I have chosen to use 'folx' instead of 'folks' because it is gender neutral term created by activist communities and I would like to honour everyone who reads this book. Replacing the 'ks' with an 'x' allows for every reader who has never been seen before to see themselves in here. We'll capitalise Black, Brown, Indigenous, People of Colour and Folx of the Global Majority because I believe it is important to centre the voices and lives of those who have been marginalised, silenced and purposefully left out of our history for so long. I am building solidarity in the language I choose.*

*I do not use the term 'minority' to describe Black, Brown and Indigenous folx because we are the majority in the world. Using the language of racism can minimise our full selves. It can allow us to forget our deepest roots and ancestors; it allows us to create a history that, while in our own voices, has been shaped by the oppressor.*

*Because race and our social identities are constructed by people (and often those with the privilege of having academia to back them up), we are still often caught in the trap of labelling ourselves in ways that centre whiteness and those in the dominant culture. I ask you, when possible, please use the names and language that honour you, your family and your history. Please use the names and language that honour those who are continually silenced and ignored, those who are renamed and have been stripped of their histories. Reclaim the language and names that were stolen and lost over decades.*

To all of you,

I wrote this book for you. It's for everyone. The words on these pages are for our ancestors and those who should not yet be our ancestors, but who passed on too soon. I wrote this for you out of a love for liberation and our humanity.

This is the book I wish I had when I was younger. And it's the book I will share with my own children. It contains information I never learned when I was younger and you will probably not be taught in school.

I wrote these words for you while carrying a heavy heart. It aches for Emmett Till, Tamir Rice, Korryn Gaines, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Bobby Hutton, Antwon Rose Jr., Stephon Clark, Rekia Boyd, Stephen Lawrence, Charleena Lyles, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Aiyana Stanley-Jones and Trayvon Martin and for all those who we honour with hashtags, our tears, our frustration and rage, our exhaustion and the fire to move on.

My optimism has brought me to action and to sharing these words with you because I believe you will help to dismantle and work toward ending racism. We need justice. No one's names should be memorialised in hashtags.

My hope is you will use this book as a way to start your journey in the big work of anti-racism. You are resisting racism and oppression just by opening these pages. You are entering into a consciousness that wakes you up and allows you to see the world in a whole new way.

Some may tell you you're too young to talk about race.

People may tell you that you should stop talking about skin colour and see everyone as a 'global citizen.' You may have been told racism isn't a problem anymore and that calling it out or bringing it up in conversation is wrong. Some people may have given you the impression that you are wrong and stirring up trouble. You are not! Racism is a problem: a very serious problem and it needs to be talked about because it isn't going away if we do nothing. It is okay for you to continue on with this book and I am so proud of you for picking this up and opening these pages.

Please know you are not alone on this journey. I am here with you. There are many, many folx who are here with you, who came before you and who will come long after us. I hope you will share this book with your friends and families because fighting racism really isn't something you can do all on your own. Make sure to look up **underlined words** in the glossary if you need help understanding.

There are many moments to pause in this book so you can check in with yourself and grow into your activism. You will learn more about yourself, our history, how racism came to be and why we're still so deep within it. We will work together, in solidarity, to disrupt racism and become anti-racist accomplices. This book is meant to be read in order. Each chapter builds on the previous chapter and you will gain a deeper understanding of becoming your anti-racist self. And, you will probably want to read and reread this. This is a start. Anti-racism is lifelong work.

In solidarity,

Tiffany

# ANTI-RACIST

An **ANTI-RACIST** person is someone who is opposed to racism.

Anti-racism is actively working against racism. It is making a commitment to resisting unjust laws, policies and racist attitudes. Anti-racism is how we get free from centuries of living in a racialised society that keeps us separate and oppressed.



IN THIS SECTION:

- WHO AM I?
- WHAT ARE MY SOCIAL IDENTITIES?
- WHAT IS RACE?
- WHAT IS RACISM?

UNDERSTANDING  
AND GROWING  
INTO MY  
IDENTITIES



**W**ho are you?  
You are *you*.  
You are the only you there is. There's so much that makes you who you are. Your identity is what makes you, **YOU**: it's all the parts that make you unique.

You are made up of your family, your friends, your neighborhood, your school, what you see on social media and read in books, what you hear and listen to, what you eat, what you wear, what you feel, your dreams, the stories you cannot wait to share and those you don't want to tell and everything in between and all around.

***YOU ARE EVERYTHING WITHIN YOU  
AND EVERYTHING THAT SURROUNDS YOU.***

You are all the ancestors who came before you: those you've never known, never heard of, never seen—and those you've passed on the street, sat next to and snuggled near.

I'm sure you've asked, **'WHO AM I?'** and others have asked, **'WHO ARE YOU?'**

How do you answer? How much of yourself do you share with others—if anything? This is who I was at 14...

I'M  
TIFFANY.

I'M 14 YEARS OLD.

**I LIVE IN A SMALL HOUSE IN NEW YORK STATE. I LIVE WITH MY MUM AND MY TWIN SISTER. I'M A BLACK BIRACIAL CISGENDER FEMALE WHO HAS BROWN EYES AND A LOT OF FRECKLES. I HAVE CURLY HAIR AND HAVE GROWN TO LOVE IT, SLOWLY, OVER TIME. I LOVE TO READ AND BAKE. I LOVE TO DANCE WITH MY FRIENDS AND I WRITE TERRIBLE POETRY THAT ONLY I WILL EVER READ. ALL OF THAT IS WHO I AM...**

***AND I'M SO MUCH MORE.***



**YOU** get to decide which identities you will share with the world and how you'll do so. You get to choose how to name your identities.

Your identity grows and changes just like you. There are some things that are static and stay with you always. My skin colour and the many freckles on my face have been with me for as long as I can remember and will continue on with me until I am 103+!

There are other parts of us that change (even daily). I can wear my hair up or down, braided or straight; I can change the colour and the length—it's all up to me.

**MANY OTHERS WILL TRY TO GET YOU TO FIT INTO AN IMAGINARY BOX.**

This box includes what we call 'the dominant culture.' If you are white, upper

middle class, **cisgender** male, educated, athletic, **neurotypical** and/or able-bodied, you are in this box. (We'll go through all of these in the next chapter.)

If you do not fit into this box, you are considered to be a part of what's called the 'subordinate culture.' Folx included in the 'subordinate culture', include Black, Brown, Indigenous People of Colour of the Global Majority, queer, transgender and **nonbinary** folx and cisgender women, youth, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, atheist and non-Christian folx, **neurodiverse**, folx living with disabilities, those living in poverty and more. There are many more that exist outside of this imaginary box than those who fit inside of it.

The dominant culture is what has been considered 'normal' and this 'normal' has been created and is maintained by those who

are in the box. It is this version of normal that has shaped how we see ourselves and the world around us.

***Who is smart? Beautiful? Worthy? A leader? Trouble?***

Many labels and descriptions have been created so it seems like people either fit neatly into the box or not. I never really did. And you don't need to either.

Our many identities make us who we are. They help others to understand who you are and for you to know more about the folx who are in your life and in the world. They connect us and divide us. Understanding who you are allows you to grow and know more about yourself. It can give you direction and empower you. The world will try to tell you who you are, but you are the only person who gets to decide that.

***YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE SEEN AND UNDERSTOOD WITHOUT HAVING TO COMPROMISE WHO YOU ARE.***



## Activity:

1. Pull out a notebook. (Make sure it's a notebook you'll want to keep coming back to; one that you can carry around with you.) For the next five minutes, write down everything you can think of that makes you who you are.

You're creating a list of your identities!

I am...

Female, cis female

Black biracial

Light skinned

A twin

A daughter

A first generation

American

A bread baker

Freckled

Tall and thin

A sister

Curly haired

English and American

An English speaker

A side sleeper

Allergic

A reader

A creator

Glasses wearer

A comfy-clothes  
wearer

A chocolate lover

Stubborn

Resistant

Optimistic

An extrovert who  
needs some  
recharge time

Always cold

A drama kid

Always right

(at least, I want  
to be...)

Confusing to others

2.

Create **your identity map**.

Grab a piece of plain paper, or continue in your notebook.

Write your name in the centre and, from there, place your identities all around you. Feel free to illustrate, as this is your map.

# ***DOMINANT CULTURE***



Before we move on, check you understand this term.

The **DOMINANT CULTURE** is the group of people in society who hold the most power and are often (but not always) in the majority. In the US and the UK: people who are white, middle class, Christian and cisgender are the dominant culture. They are in charge of the institutions and have established behaviours, values and traditions that are considered acceptable and the 'norm' in our countries.

*YOUR MANY IDENTITIES ARE PARTS OF THE WHOLE YOU: ONE PART ALONE DOES NOT DEFINE WHO YOU ARE.*

Some of those parts you create for yourself. Other parts of your identity have been created by society. **‘SOCIETY’** is another way of saying community. These identities have been created, named, framed and defined by society for a very long time. We call them **‘SOCIAL IDENTITIES.’** Your social identity is the you that relates to other people in society (for example, your neighborhood, city, or country). Much of our culture comes from our social identities and the groups we belong to.

## CATEGORIES

Our social identities are broken down into groups,

or categories, that we get lumped into. This is not always our choice. Others may place you in categories even though you may not identify in the same way. This is a way of trying to figure you and others like you out. It is how our communities and countries have been set up for centuries. While the social identity categories can help us to see and understand ourselves and the people around us, they also determine how others will treat us. It is our job to learn and act.

First ask: What are these social identities and why do they exist? Analyze them with a critical and conscious eye and then work to undo why this is our current situation.

**YOU HAVE  
THE ABILITY  
TO CREATE  
A NEW  
HISTORY**



In this book we will focus mostly on our racial identities. But there are many categories within our identities that affect the way we interact with society. You may be familiar with the following:



The parts of your identity that you notice and are most aware of on a daily basis may change depending on where you are, who you are with and the experiences you continue to have in life. The identities you do not think much about, even the ones you barely notice, are always with you.

## PRIVILEGE

Some social identities hold power and privilege, others do not. Even within us, there are parts of us that hold some power and other parts that are oppressed. This is why we work to understand our identities within society; we need to always examine our whole selves. The identities that fit neatly into the imaginary box are typically the ones with the most power and **agency**.

One example of where I have some power is the language I speak. I live in a country where the most commonly spoken language is English. I can read and understand signs and directions. I can walk into a school or store and the folx helping me will likely know what I'm talking about. I don't have to worry.

Privilege is the benefits you receive due to how close you are to the dominant culture. For example: a white, cisgender man, who is

able-bodied, **heterosexual**, considered handsome and speaks English has more privilege than a Black **transgender** woman. Those with privilege have power over others. Not everyone has privilege. Folx who do not benefit from their social identities, who are in the subordinate culture, have little to no privilege and power.

Some of our identities hold privileges and disadvantages at the same time. Because I am cis female, I don't have to think about which restroom I will be able to use. I have agency.

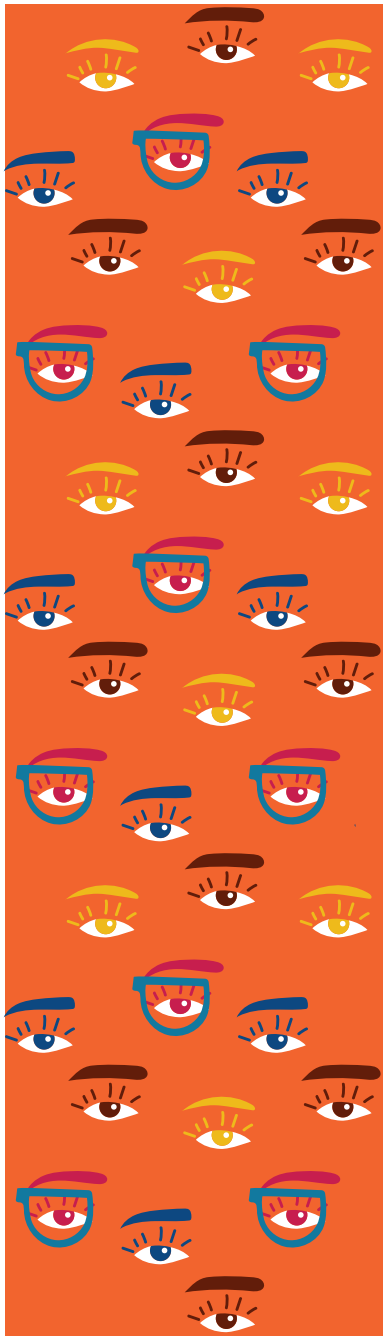
## INTERSECTIONALITY

Looking at intersectionality helps us to understand how our social identities affect our whole life. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black female lawyer, author, scholar and civil rights activist used the term intersectionality in 1989 to help us better understand that being a woman AND Black created greater disadvantages than just being a woman.

But because I am female, I do not have the same privileges a **cis male** has. I am more likely to be overlooked for a position of leadership and get paid less for the same amount of work. While many cis heterosexual men can confidently walk alone at night, I cannot without feeling some fear that I may be harmed.

Although I do not have the same privileges as a white cisgender male, I do have privileges trans and nonbinary folx do not have because my cisgender identity is closer to the dominant culture.





A Black woman is **marginalised** because she is a woman and because she is Black. Her experiences overlap and cause great harm. When you just look at a person through a single lens you can only narrowly understand them and their experiences.

*WHEN YOU LOOK AT ALL OF THE PARTS OF A PERSON AND WHERE THEY ARE OPPRESSED, YOU WILL BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW DEEPLY DISCRIMINATION ADVANCES ONWARD.*

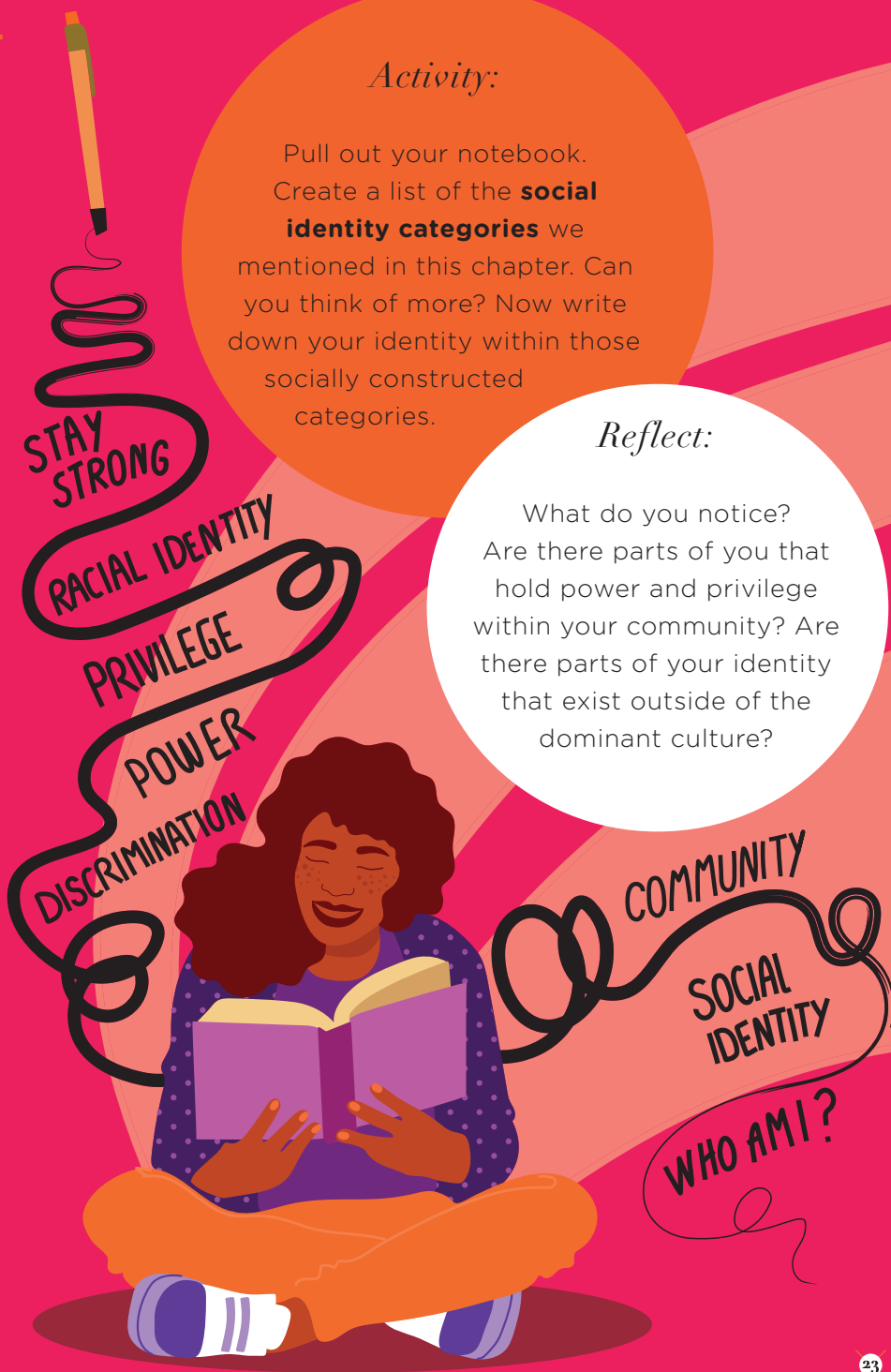
Knowing who we are, where we hold agency, how our identities came to be and how they determine our roles in society helps us to understand ourselves and how we can change a system where some folx have privilege and power and some folx are under-resourced and oppressed, to one where we are all liberated. (We will learn more about privilege in chapters 15 and 17.)

### *Activity:*

Pull out your notebook. Create a list of the **social identity categories** we mentioned in this chapter. Can you think of more? Now write down your identity within those socially constructed categories.

### *Reflect:*

What do you notice? Are there parts of you that hold power and privilege within your community? Are there parts of your identity that exist outside of the dominant culture?



In this book, when we talk about race, we are referring to our skin colour. People have been divided for centuries based on the differences in skin tone, hair texture, facial features and cultural heritage.

*THE CONCEPT OF RACE IS NOT ACTUALLY BASED ON SCIENCE, IT IS A CREATION OF SOCIETY.*

The categories for race have been created, over many years, by people in the dominant culture. In the mid-1700s, European scientists started to classify people just as they categorised plants and animals. We still study some of them like Carl Linnaeus and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in our schools today.<sup>1</sup> Their 'science' created a hierarchy of humans, which placed Europeans with the lightest skin at the top. Indigenous folk and those with the darkest skin were not valued.

The racial categories we get lumped into in the US include: White, Black (or, African American), Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native (or, Indigenous), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Multiracial (also called Biracial or Mixed).

Your skin colour, along with many of your characteristics, were passed down to you from generation to generation. Folk with African ancestry have more melanin than those with European ancestry. Melanin is the pigment in our skin



that protects us from the UV rays of the sun and takes in vitamin D.

The term 'white' includes people with ancestors from Europe, in particular, Northern Europe. They have the least amount of pigmentation. The term Black includes folx with ancestors mainly from Africa (this includes African Americans, folx from Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and other countries in the Caribbean). They have more melanin because they live closer to the equator, where there is more sunlight. The term Brown includes folx with Asian and/or **Latinx** ancestry.<sup>2</sup> Indigenous refers to folx whose ancestors were the first people in a particular land or area. Biracial and multiracial folx have ancestry from two or more different racial categories.

## **ETHNICITY**

Race often gets confused

with **ethnicity**. Your ethnic identity is your cultural identity. This is also a **social construction**. Unlike race, which specifically looks at your physical features, ethnicity zeroes in on your family's cultural and ancestral heritage—like language, traditions and history—to place you into categories. Some examples of ethnicities are: Japanese American, Caribbean Navajo and Sudanese. Often, where you are from will partly determine your ethnicity.

The names for these divisions, as well as the definition of race, have changed and continue to do so. For example, in the past, people used the term Caucasian to refer to those with a lack of melanin. The word was popularised in the late 1800s by the German **anthropologist** we mentioned earlier, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. He referred to Europeans and the people who lived

in the Caucasus region as 'the most beautiful race of men.'<sup>3</sup> (This, of course, was based on his opinion and not on scientific data.) So, in this book, we will refer to white people as white.

Another example of how the names of the categories have changed is the term 'mulatto.' When I was a kid, many folx (including teachers and family) referred to me using that word rather than calling me biracial. 'Mulatto' means young mule. It was once believed that children with a Black parent and a white parent were like the mule, from two different species. While the word mulatto is still used today, it is not acceptable. I am not a mule. I am a whole person.

The official categories for race change depending on where you are in the world.

In the United States, there are five categories for race: White, American Indian or

Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. In South Africa, the racial categories are: Black African, Coloured, Indian or Asian, White and Other. ('Coloured' refers to bi- and multiracial folx.) White, mestizo and Black are the categories used in Uruguay. (Mestizo refers to folx who have European and Indigenous ancestry.)

In the United Kingdom, the categories for people are a mix of racial and ethnic identities. They include: White, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, Asian/Asian British, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and 'Other' ethnic groups.

Seeing how every country has a different way of classifying people shows us that **RACE AND ETHNICITY REALLY ARE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS.**

The words I use to describe

my race have changed over the years. My dad is Black and my mum is white. I have light brown skin, many freckles across my face, brown eyes and curly hair. My ethnic identity encompasses all I know about our family background: English, African American, French, Irish and (I've been told) Sioux. When I was a kid, our school district labeled us as white. Maybe because I lived with my white mom? Maybe because of my light skin? Maybe to fill some statistical quote? I don't know. I am Black biracial.<sup>4</sup>

Race is confusing. There is, of course, no scientific evidence that proves folk with the lightest skin are smarter, prettier and better. But this has been the way we, as a species, have been doing things for centuries. Ta-Nehisi Coates writes in *Between the World and Me*:



*'BUT  
RACE IS  
THE CHILD  
OF RACISM,  
NOT THE  
FATHER.'*

We have been taught to categorise people based on their skin colour, their nation of origin and their physical features by the people with the most power. People in the dominant culture have worked for centuries to create laws, policies and institutions to guarantee that they will always maintain that power. We'll look more closely at this in the next chapters.

### Activity:

Pull out your notebook or a piece of paper, grab a favorite pen and find a place where you can think without interruption.

Take a deep breath and reflect on **your own race and ethnicity**. You may use these questions for guidance:

1. What do you know about your ethnic identity?
2. Is this something you and your family and friends have talked about?
3. Do you think about your race? (and how often?)
4. Do you think about your ethnic identity, too?
5. Do you feel like your racial identity and your ethnic identity are similar? Are they in harmony?

**TAKE  
A DEEP  
BREATH.**

Someone described racism to me as the smog we breathe. It is all around us; racism is everywhere. Our lives are polluted with racism and it harms us all. The more we are aware of this smog of racism, the better equipped we can become to combat this toxic way of being.

When folx hear the word racism, many different things come up because there are multiple different explanations and interpretations. Everyone has their own understanding and beliefs around racism. Some of the ones you may be most familiar with are:

RACISM IS A SYSTEM OF ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES BASED ON RACE.

PREJUDICE + POWER = RACISM

IT IS PREJUDICE OR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST SOMEONE BASED ON RACE.

THE BELIEF THAT MEMBERS OF EACH RACE HAVE DIFFERENT CHARACTERISTICS. BECAUSE OF THIS, FOLX BELIEVE THAT SOME ARE INFERIOR AND SOME ARE SUPERIOR.

The best definition I've ever heard came from an anti-racist training I did several years ago. Racism is personal prejudice AND the **systemic** misuse and abuse of power by **institutions**. When I refer to racism, this is the definition I am using.

**RACISM IS PERSONAL PREJUDICE AND BIAS AND THE SYSTEMIC MISUSE AND ABUSE OF POWER BY INSTITUTIONS**



Using this understanding of racism allows us to see how it truly impacts all of our lives. We have a lot of work ahead of us to break it down.

### *RACISM IS NOT JUST PREJUDICE!*

Everyone has prejudices or **biases**. These are our judgments: the things we discriminate against. Some of our prejudices are conscious and some are not. They are things we've learned and assumed from everything around us. This includes the **stereotypes** we've witnessed. Whether you are in the dominant culture or not also contributes to your prejudices. We begin to form prejudices when we are two years old.<sup>5</sup> Our biases are absorbed, we take them in and they become a part of our belief system. But they can change.

### **BEAUTY**

In many places in the world people have absorbed the bias that light skin and European features are the most desirable. White people are considered to be the standard for beauty. (Does this sound familiar? We can thank Linnaeus and Blumenbach for this.) For hundreds of years people have believed and passed on the beliefs that folk with darker skin are inferior. Those with the lightest skin

have been treated the best, have had the most power and continue to pass along the bias that light skin is superior. To be considered beautiful, to fit into the box of what is considered 'normal', some folk try to lighten their skin with bleaching creams and some use chemicals to alter their hair.

I spent several of my young teen years trying to force my naturally curly hair into straight 'white' hair.

This cost my mum a lot of money, I wasted a lot of time sitting in the salon chair and it caused a lot of pain on my head. The beautician placed a series of chemicals on my scalp to rearrange my curls, to undo the natural texture and then, after several hours, straightened my hair with a very hot iron. This process did not last very long. After about six weeks my hair started to grow and my kinky roots showed. The process of trying to not have curls caused burns on my scalp (which took weeks to heal) and my hair to break in large chunks. I kept this going all throughout middle school and into my second year of high school, until the kid whose locker was next to mine saw my curls after

swimming. He said 'why don't you keep your hair like that?' I didn't have a good answer for him, or for myself. I kept my natural curls after that. My prejudice against my own curly hair and my desire to look more like my white friends caused me to dislike a part of myself.

We have been conditioned to the bias of whiteness. We can undo this. People play a big role in keeping racism going. If we do not work to recognise our prejudices, we remain a part of the equation. When we become aware of our biases and our role in racism, then we can begin to understand how we are a part of a system that is much bigger than us.

**RACISM IS A PART OF OUR SOCIETY,  
BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE.**



### *Activity:*

Draw a line down the middle of a page in your notebook. On one side write '*I AM...*' and on the other write '*AND I AM...*'

Think of all the identities you fulfil in the 'I Am' column. In the 'And I am...' column, show how you are more than just that identity and speak truth about who you are.

#### *I am...*

- a twin
- light skinned
- biracial
- a first generation-American
- freckled

#### *And I am...*

- my own person.
- Black.
- a whole person.
- proud of our family history.
- in love with my extra melanin.