

# **TALKING** **ABOUT** **RACE**

From Academy-Award nominated filmmaker Frances Reid

**Curriculum Guide and Suggested Resources To Accompany the DVD**  
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## Synopsis and Key Points

One of the most important conversations that can take place on a college campus today is an open, honest discussion about race and racism. This discussion is also one of the most difficult. *Talking about Race* is designed to open up discussion by showing us real students talking about real issues. The opinions expressed by these students are shared by many of their peers across the nation.

In *Talking About Race, Module 1*, students from the University of California, Texas A&M University and The University of Massachusetts, candidly share their views on the following issues:

- Their expectations about going to college;
- Self-separation of racial groups;
- The campus climate toward talking about race;
- Forms of discrimination;
- Affirmative action policies, and;
- Individual responsibility for change.

In *Talking about Race Module 2*, twenty-three students from six American universities come together for three days to support and challenge one another through open, honest conversation. The film opens with a candid, large-group discussion about the concept of individuality. We also hear the White students express their feelings about the confusing nature of being White in America today. Next, the Asian American students tell us what they want their allies to know and to do. The module concludes with a lively discussion about taking steps to dismantle racism.

## Using these Modules in Workshops or Classrooms

The modules can be used either by themselves or as one piece in a larger workshop or classroom agenda. The manner in which you use them will be dictated by the amount of time you have, the size of your group, your personal facilitation style and the level of dialogue that already exists on your campus. The section of this guide titled [Selected Resources for Developing Educational Workshops and Courses about Racism](#) features books and websites containing a variety of activities and information to use in conjunction with the films.

Each module can be used separately or the two can be shown back to back. If both are used, it is important to show them in sequence. Each module has three sections, with each section focusing on a different topic. Outlined below are several methods for using the modules.

### One section at a time

One approach is to use each module, pausing after each of the three sections to lead a discussion about that particular topic. You may also want to conduct an interactive activity to explore the topic further. If you choose this style, you may want to have fairly specific discussion questions. When using this approach you must be prepared to intervene and wrap up the discussion in order to move on to the next section of the module.

### One module at a time

Another option is to show one entire module then begin the discussion. This method works particularly well if there are only one or two specific topics that you want to address. One advantage to this format is that the discussion can flow freely. A disadvantage is that because so many topics are addressed in each film, it may be difficult to focus the discussion. As always, it will be up to you the facilitator, to keep the discussion on track.

### Both modules together

A third option is to show both modules back to back then start a discussion. Again, your discussion may be difficult to focus. However, if your goal is to start general dialogue and you prefer to let the participants define the topics to be discussed, this may be the best alternative.

### Introducing the modules

Just as with any video or activity, it is important to “set up” these modules for your workshop participants. Tell them that they will see real college students from around the country expressing their own personal views. Acknowledge that the participants may not agree with all of the perspectives they hear, but that it is important for them to listen and learn from the different points of view. Finally, let them know that they will have the opportunity to discuss what they see at the end of the module (or after each section, if you choose.)

## Review of Content & Suggested Discussion Questions

### Talking About Race, Module 1

#### SECTION 1

##### *Groups on Campus*

Module 1 begins with students talking about their expectations of what they thought they would find when they went to college.

*Notice the difference in perspectives between the first two students. Marc and Brian both attend the same university, but they have completely different views about how many students of color attend the university.*

This section continues with different perspectives on how and why students separate themselves by race on campus. Dane does not see the reason to have separate organizations for students of color and doesn't understand why "all the Black students sit together" in the cafeteria. Freda responds with the observation that in fact all the White students also sit together. Duane ends the section by commenting that as a Black student, why should he have to come over to someone else's group, when they can come over to his.

#### **Discussion Questions**

- What were your expectations about whom you would meet at college? How have your expectations differed from reality?
- Since you have been at college do you find you are friends with the same "kinds" of people you knew at home, or has there been a change?
- Have you experienced the desire to be around people who are like you? When is this important to you? When was the first time you became aware of your racial identity.
- How do you feel about Freda's comment that "all the White students sit together?"

#### SECTION 2

##### *Campus Climate*

This section begins with Lisa talking about how uncomfortable she feels when issues of race and ethnicity come up at her school. Khanh then introduces the concept of reverse discrimination

by talking about White students claiming to be “victims” when taking an ethnic studies class. Tammy then talks about her experience joining the Black Awareness Committee.

In the next part of this section we hear statements by three White students. Dane begins with a confession about using racist epithets; Marc explains how he feels Blacks are hypersensitive to characterizations of themselves; and, Michael tells us how he believes it is wrong to declare someone hypersensitive until you truly understand their circumstances.

*It is key here to notice the different developmental levels of the White students indicated by their comments. Think about how the stereotypes and assumptions that each student holds are underlying the opinions they express.*

### **Discussion Questions**

- How is the use of derogatory terms related to stereotypes?
- Why should we avoid stereotyping?
- How do you react when you feel someone is stereotyping you?
- Do you think people would have a different reaction to someone stuffing their bellies for “Italian night” than they would to putting on “black face” for “African night?” Why?
- How would you feel about joining a student organization in which all the members were of a different racial group than yourself?

## **SECTION 3**

### ***Affirmative Action***

This section focuses on the sensitive topic of affirmative action. We hear three perspectives. Marc tells us about friends who have not received scholarships which he believes were given to students based on their race. Freda then explains how ridiculous it is that people assume “she just walked in here” without working hard. Finally, Judith tells us that she did in fact get into college because of affirmative action and why that was necessary.

### ***Responsibility for Change***

The first film concludes with Marc telling us that he and others like him should not be blamed for slavery. Brian points out the need to understand that although young people today should not be blamed for what happened in the past, we all need to take responsibility for the way things are and ask ourselves, “what are we doing about it?”

### **Discussion Questions**

- What is affirmative action? Why is it necessary?
- How have you been positively impacted by affirmative action?
- What can you do on your campus to make an impact on race relations?

## Review of Content & Suggested Discussion Questions

### Talking about Race, Module 2

#### SECTION 1

##### *Individualism*

Module 2 opens with a group discussion in which eight students express their views. Notice the wide range of emotions as the students share their perspectives.

Dane begins the conversation by stating that he alone is responsible for his actions. He is then told that some people will hate him simply because he is White. Khanh brings up the issue that White people need to understand the ways they have internalized a sense of superiority as a result of racism. Marc feels uncomfortable in this discussion because he believes he is being blamed for everything. Judith states that she is not willing to temper her feelings so that White people will not feel uncomfortable. Tammy follows with the assertion that she wants to be judged as an individual. Duane says he also needs to be judged as an individual, but because of the many stereotypes about Black people, this rarely happens. Section 1 concludes with Freda expressing her need for White people to understand the benefits they receive from oppression.

*Notice how the discussion progresses and then culminates with Freda's comment. Her statement is one of the most crucial in the module because the understanding of White privilege is so critical to understanding and working to eliminate racism.*

##### **Discussion Questions**

- How easy is it to judge people as individuals?
- Why does Marc feel like he is being blamed for everything?
- Freda says white people benefit from oppression. In what ways do they benefit?

#### SECTION 2

##### *White Students*

The beginning of Section 2 is a discussion among all the White students. If you listen very carefully, as the scene opens you will hear Marc state that he believes the “tables are turning” and that he feels the need to apologize for being White. Dane and Tammy then share differing



perspectives about what they have learned about the concept of “rugged individualism.” Tammy says she has discovered that the concept does not hold true for everyone in this country. The two also share their experiences of talking about race with their families. Tammy believes that although it is tough to do, she has to try to talk about it or else she is simply giving up.

### ***Asian American Students***

Section 2 continues with scenes from a “speak out” activity by the Asian American students. The students share some important information that they would like others to know about Asian Americans, what they never want to hear again, and what they expect from their allies.

#### **Discussion Questions**

- Why do you think Marc feels a need to apologize for being White?
- Do you think the American concept of “rugged individualism” applies to all Americans?
- What did you learn from the statements made by the Asian American students?

### **SECTION 3**

#### ***Awareness to Action***

Section 3 focuses on taking action to eliminate racism. Marc asks Brian to clarify what he means by “action” and Brian shares several strategies for letting go of stereotypes. Marc admits that eliminating oppression is a big job, and he also admits that he does not have to worry about it because he is White.

*Marc’s admission of privilege is very important and reveals a new level of awareness brought on by his involvement in this activity. Think about how different this statement is from his comments in Module 1.*

Section 3 ends with both Marc and Brian stating that they don’t know what will happen in the future, leaving us to wonder what could happen.

#### **Discussion Questions**

- How easy is it to confront your friends about racist comments and jokes?
- How important is it to confront your friends about racist comments and jokes?

- What does Marc mean when he says “I don’t have to worry about it, I am all set”?
- Think of a prejudice you hold. What was its origin? What reinforces it today? Can you change it?

### **Tips for Facilitating Discussion**

#### **Create a comfortable atmosphere**

Smile! Be interested in what people are saying and let that interest show. Look at the person who is speaking. Maintain positive, open body language.

#### **Encourage participation**

Encourage participants to share opinions by using comment such as, “good point,” “excellent idea,” “great question,” etc. This may mean working harder to draw out some quieter participants as well as dealing patiently with those who are resistant to the information or subject matter. If you sense there are opposing views that participants are reluctant to express but could benefit the discussion, welcome them to share by making a comment such as “I could really see how someone might feel that....”

#### **Avoid lecturing**

Be sure that participants do not feel that they are being told how to think and believe. They should feel that they play an important role in the information that is being given. When it is beneficial for you to give out information, make sure you give participants the opportunity to process the lesson and discuss what they have learned.

#### **Do not dominate the discussion**

Participants will learn a great deal from listening to each other. Let others express their views. Expressing your view too soon may be interpreted as the only “right” opinion. This may intimidate participants and prevent them from sharing. If one or two participants are dominating the discussion, point out that any discussion about difference is most valuable when many perspectives are expressed.

#### **Provide a variety of discussion formats**

Realize that some people find it hard to express their views in the large group but might feel comfortable speaking in dyads or small groups.

#### **Allow silence**

Be careful not to jump in every time there is a pause in the conversation. Silence can be very valuable in allowing time for participants to process information or collect their thoughts for a response.

#### **Use humor with care**

Humor used appropriately can do a great deal to help maintain a positive interaction. The use of sarcasm however can cause participants to feel that others are laughing *at* them instead of *with* them.

**Provide outside resources**

If you do not know the answer to a question, the best thing to do is to admit to it and volunteer to help find the information and provide it at a later time.

Note: This list of facilitation tips is just a start. Please consult texts listed in the section titled “Selected Resources for Developing Educational Workshops and Courses” for more information.

## Teaching about Racism as more than Personal Prejudice

These films present a variety of students' perspectives on race and racism. The opportunity to hear these different perspectives is a very important component of anti-racism education. It is important for educators to keep in mind however that most college students today tend to view racism as individual bias and prejudice without an understanding of the broader systemic nature of the problem. Therefore one goal of anti-racism educators should be to help students move from viewing racism as individual bigotry to recognizing its complex nature as a systemic phenomenon that pervades every aspect of United States society. The *Talking about Race* films are a great way to open the conversation about racism. There is, however, a great deal more to say. Educators who use these films are encouraged to use them in conjunction with additional information, activities, and readings that will help students understand that American racism is "centuries-long, deep lying, institutionalized, and systemic" (Feagin, 2001 p. 16) and therefore cannot be understood in individual terms alone.

The shift from conceptualizing racism as an individual phenomenon to seeing it as systemic can be particularly challenging because the notion of racism as systemic is in direct contrast to many students' core values and assumptions that America is built on the principles of hard work and merit. White students in particular tend to believe that all Americans are seen and treated as individuals and that any individual who works hard will be rewarded through a fair and just society. Most White Americans do not tend to see slavery, legal segregation, or contemporary racism as pieces of an American *system* of racism. Instead, racism is seen as a blemish on American history that, with the exception of a few "bad" individuals, has essentially been eradicated. One of the most insidious aspects of contemporary racism is its ability to remain camouflaged in everyday practices, policies, and ideas. Because of this, educators need to be vigilant in helping students unearth the complexity of racism. A list of resources is provided to help educators with this process. We hope you will find it useful.

## Selected Resources for Understanding Systemic Racism in the United States

### Websites

*The following websites provide supplemental information and activities that can be used in conjunction with the films.*

#### **Race: The Power of an Illusion**

This is a wonderfully informative and interactive website which explores the ways that race resides not in nature but in U.S. politics, economics, and culture. Interactive activities guide students to an understanding of the ways that race has been socially constructed throughout U.S. history and the ways that institutionalized racism has led to current racial inequality.

[http://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_General/000\\_00-Home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)

#### **Understanding Prejudice.org**

This site explores the causes and consequences of prejudice. The site includes over 2,000 links to other prejudice-related resources as well as searchable databases. Although the site is intended for use as a supplement to a college textbook titled *Understanding Prejudice* (McGraw-Hill) all pages and activities are freely available for use.

<http://www.understandingprejudice.org>

### Books

*The following is a short list of books that have proven to be particularly well suited for work with college students. They cover a range of topics including the development of the concept of race (Smedley), the history of institutionalized racism (Takaki, Oliver & Shapiro), current manifestations of racism (Bonilla-Silva, Feagin), racial identity development (Tatum) and white privilege (Bush, Wise,). Taken together they build a picture of how past and present institutionalized racism and racist ideology has resulted in contemporary racial inequality. Although there are many other valuable books and articles about racism, the following constitute a foundational library for anyone teaching about issues of racism today.*

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2001). *White supremacy and racism in the post-civil rights era*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Bush, M. (2004) *Breaking the code of good intentions: Everyday forms of whiteness*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield.

Brown, M. K., Carnoy, M., Currie, E., Duster, T., Oppenheimer, D., Shultz, M., et al. (2003). *Whitewashing race: the myth of a color-blind society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lipsitz, G. (1998). *The possessive investment in whiteness: How white people profit from identity politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Feagin, J.R. (2001). *Racist America: Roots, current realities, & future reparations*. New York: Routledge.

Smedley, A. (1999). *Race in North America* (second ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Takaki, R. (1993) *A different mirror: A multicultural history of America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Tatum, B. (1997) *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* New York: Basic Books.

McNamee, S.J., & Miller, R.K. (2004) *The meritocracy myth*. New York: Rowan & Littlefield.

Oliver, M. L., & Shapiro, T.M. (1997). *Black wealth/white wealth*. New York: Routledge.

Roediger, D. (1991). *The wages of whiteness: Race and the making of the American working class*. New York: Verso.

Wise, T. (2005). *Affirmative action: Racial preference in Black and White*. New York: Routledge.

Wise, T. (2005). *White like me: Reflections on race from a privileged son*. Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press.

## Selected Resources for Developing Educational Workshops and Courses about Racism in the United States

*The following books and article provide valuable information including conceptual foundations and pedagogical frameworks as well as specific activities and curriculum outlines for teaching about issues of race and racism.*

Adams, M., Bell, L.A., & Griffin, P. (1997) *Teaching for diversity and social justice*. New York: Routledge.

Derman-Sparks, L., & Phillips, C.B. (1997). *Teaching and learning anti-racism: A developmental approach*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Goodman, D.J. (2001). *Promoting diversity and social justice: Educating people from privileged groups*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Fox, H. (2001). *When race breaks out*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Schmidt, S.L. (2005) More than men in white sheets: Concepts critical to the teaching of racism as systemic inequality. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 38(2).

