

TALKING ABOUT RACE

THINKING TRANSFORMATIVELY

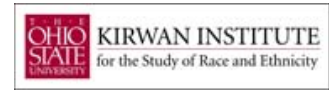


Talking About Race: THINKING TRANSFORMATIVELY

Traditional View	Transformative View
Affirmative action is not needed, and it leads to “reverse discrimination.”	Affirmative action continues to be a vital—if imperfect—tool for removing discriminatory obstacles that confront women and people of color. The goal of affirmative action is to give ALL PEOPLE equal access to opportunities in education and employment.
Talking about race is divisive and polarizing; color-blindness is the answer.	There are unifying transformative ways to talk about race. Even when race is not talked about, people see race and make racialized decisions and policies. Not talking about race masks racial disparities and inhibits movement toward social justice.
The real issue is class, not race.	Race and class are intertwined. A strictly class-based movement will ultimately fragment because of race.
We get what we deserve in life. If some racial groups aren’t doing as well as others, people just need to work harder.	While individual effort matters, our well-being is also powerfully shaped by institutional conditions/arrangements and opportunity structures.
People like Tiger Woods, George Lopez, and Oprah Winfrey are proof that anyone can be successful in America.	Cumulative structural inequality has its greatest impact on groups, not individuals. There have always been exceptionally successful people from all races and ethnicities.
Racism is about blatant, intentional bigotry.	The consequences of structural/institutional racism are significantly greater than those of personal racial animus.
The kind of overt racial bias and discrimination that we saw in the past does not exist today.	While research indicates that implicit (subconscious) racial bias is more pervasive than explicit bias, overt discrimination in sectors like housing and lending tells us that racial prejudice is still alive.
Segregation exists because African Americans and other people of color prefer to live among “their own.”	Segregated “racialized” space is created by structural racism and discrimination. Our choices are informed by structures, institutional arrangements and our sense of what is possible. People do not choose to live in low-opportunity communities.
What happens outside my family and friendship circles doesn’t have much to do with me.	We share a “linked fate.” The consequences of structural racism impact the entire society—not just people of color—and threaten our democracy.

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Talking About Race: TALKING POINTS

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- Discussions about race-based disparities without accompanying examples and dialogue about the dynamics that enable people to overcome the barriers that create these disparities, do not resonate well with non-progressive audiences.
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- Discussions about injustice and social inequality do not resonate positively if the impacted group(s) is not regarded favorably by the audience.
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- Seemingly conscious positions on issues related to opportunity, diversity, affirmative action, and other race-sensitive social justice topics are often driven by subtle unconscious “symbolic” attitudes that may be more powerful than the decision maker’s own self-interest. Racial bias is often one of these subconscious attitudes.
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- Many Americans have an inadequate understanding of the consequences of structural racism and cumulative race-based inequality; they believe that the playing field is “level.” This misperception colors the way that audiences react to messages about inequality in health, education, employment, housing, and other opportunity domains, and more generally, about social justice. For example, many Americans believe that housing in metropolitan areas is segregated because people of color choose to isolate themselves in depressed neighborhoods void of opportunity.
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- The degree to which a message about race resonates with the audience and the way that it resonates depends on the “frame” that is employed to contextualize the message. If audiences reject the frame, they will most likely reject the message. “Framing” messages to appeal to conscious information processing is the flip side of “priming” to influence subconscious attitudes and behaviors.
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- Concepts like opportunity, diversity and racial justice are fundamental to American Democracy. Racial and ethnic division weakens Democracy and creates challenges for all Americans.
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- Acknowledging that racial, gender, class and other hierarchies exist is not the same as condoning them.
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- A country is only as strong as its people are strong. As long as persistent race-based inequality exists, America cannot reach its full potential and remain competitive in the global marketplace.
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- We have created geographic and ideological boundaries around American citizens based on their race and ethnicity. The reality is that “they are us; we are all Americans and our fates are linked...”
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- The opportunity playing field has both improved and worsened, depending on the indicators used to make this assessment. For example, the number of non-whites in business and in higher education is increasing, but there are more African Americans and Latinos in prison and stuck in poor inner-city neighborhoods than at any other time in our history.
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- Class and race are profoundly connected; they cannot be easily separated or reduced to each other. The formation of the working class was a racialized phenomenon that still impacts all of us. However, class is not a proxy for race. While many Americans from all socioeconomic groups are struggling to achieve the American dream, research shows that even when income and education levels are similar, African American and Latino families face greater challenges than White families in education, health care, criminal justice, and other opportunity domains.
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