



Questions and Topics for Discussion

Waking Up White, And Finding Myself in the Story of Race by Debby Irving

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1. Irving brings up the ideas of Natural order and Level Playing Field (land of opportunity/American Dream for all). Were you socialized with either of these ideas? How? What were you taught growing up about who was in charge, and other social identity groups like impoverished people of people of color?
2. She observes that her hometown was not randomly white, but that intentional policies has kept people of color from buying a home there (GI Bill). Does this mirror anyone else's experience?
3. Irving names 3 practices that help her in this work ("individual work to think about our own belief systems is a crucial piece of moving beyond racism"). Which of the below strategies seems easiest or hardest for you?
 - a. Curiosity - We'll always make snap judgements, but it's important to ask: which voices are present, what messages are sent, whose perspective am I not hearing?
 - b. Courage - being courageous makes it easier to continue to be courageous
 - c. Tolerance - for her own discomfort with imperfection
4. What are rules from the "rule book" of social interaction that you grew up with? Can you imagine how it interferes with honest cross-cultural dialogue?
5. "[My parents] were passing onto me a survival skill, one that bought a place in the high-class world of comfort and gentility, even if that meant diminishing one's capacity to plug into the circuitry of feelings, cutting oneself off from one's own heart and soul. The culture of niceness did nothing short of program me away from my humanity and into a socially scripted role with diminished capacity to feel my way through situations."
 - a. On anger, culture of niceness, and angry black person stereotype - What do you need when angry? How do you react when people are angry - specifically people of color?
 - b. Talk about a time when "niceness" prevented you from speaking honestly. What were you afraid to risk?

6. Debby Irving writes, “Cross-racial relationships are essential to racial healing. The kind of contact and connection they engender is indeed the antidote to the centuries-old pattern of segregation and avoidance.” She also writes, “White people must learn how to listen to the experiences of people of color for racial healing and justice to happen.” Respond to the following questions by mutual invitation: Have you tried to form relationships across racial lines? If so, were you successful? If not, what has held you back? Have you ever found yourself “not believing” a person of color when a story of discrimination was told to you?
7. Share examples related to Irving’s insight that moving away from maintaining her self-image and admitting her ignorance and missteps is what is considered “good”?
8. From bystander to ally- What might prevent you from stepping out of the bystander role and into the ally role? Make a list of the reasons. What do you notice as you look at this list? What might you do to overcome the obstacles you’ve listed?
9. Debby Irving writes, “I couldn’t have known at the age of five that by thinking a fellow human being less human, I made myself less human, or that by disconnecting from my human family I began the process of disconnecting from my natural intuition and ability to love.” Respond to the following question: What is the cost of racism to white people? What do we lose?
10. One of the most important things we, as white people, can do to dismantle racism is talk to other white people about race. Answer the following questions: Have you ever been an all-white setting when a racist comment was made? What did you do? What was helpful and what wasn’t? What strategies might you use in the future in these types of situations?

Do you have a good question to add to this list? Contact: reference@blueearthcountymn.gov