

Ten Ways that Thoughtful, Good-hearted People Disagree about Race & Racism

From Furious to Curious

A New Dialogue-Sparking Series from the Village Square¹



1. How serious of a problem is racism in America?

- It's one of the biggest problems facing American society and the world as well. Since ending racism is one of our most serious challenges, more attention needs to be given to many aspects of the issue.
- It's not as big of a problem as currently portrayed - especially in light of dramatic advances we've made in American society. It certainly seems that excessive attention is being paid to it.

2. Are African-Americans being treated unfairly by law enforcement and criminal justice?

- Racial minorities are clearly being targeted in a way that is intentional, disproportionate and harmful. Statistical evidence backs that up - confirming that African-Americans are being systematically targeted by police.
- The idea that police are targeting minorities is an over-generalized perception based on random incidents and misinterpreted statistics. The inconvenient reality no one wants to talk about is this: Higher rates of violence and crime in African-American communities require law enforcement to be more involved, more frequently.

3. Are African-Americans being shot and killed more often by police right now?

- This is a clear reality confirmed by steady incidents of innocent black men being killed. As is well known, this often happens when they aren't even showing any signs of threat - reflected in accounts of people being shot in the back, when they possessed no firearm or when their hands were up in the air.
- Police brutality is being sensationalized in the media by stories taken out of context - obscuring the reality that lethal police brutality remains an extremely rare event. Not only does statistical evidence confirm white and black people are shot at the same rate, but the overwhelming majority of people killed by police were either shooting at police or attacking them with a weapon.

4. Are claims that the African-American community has a greater problem with crime and violence fair?

- *No, they are not.* Although there are some differences that show up, these cannot be separated from the historical disadvantages this community has faced - or the ongoing structural inequities that continue to unfairly burden the community. To discuss crime rates outside of this context is harmful and misguided.
- *Yes, they are.* Although being 13% of population, African-Americans commit 50% of our nation's homicide. That is simply one example of a pattern that is hardly discussed - with any attention or responsibility deflected by an emphasis on historical oppressions. You cannot have an honest discussion about police conduct without having an honest discussion about black crime.

5. How much of a problem are racial inequity and white privilege?

- *Big problems.* On many levels, white Americans continue to enjoy extensive privilege simply not available to racial minorities in the country. Until we have a more serious conversation about ensuring fair access to resources, these same minorities won't have an equal chance at the lives all Americans deserve. That's why we need to talk about white privilege more.

¹ The intention is to fairly "map out" both key questions and the associated responses - drawing upon the strongest arguments, in the simplest and most objective language possible. The attempt here is to represent fairly the most reasonable and nuanced perspectives on both sides - in a way that would be recognizable to each side - 'yes, that's it!')

- *Exaggerated issues.* While it's true that different individuals enjoy different levels of resources in America, by and large these come from measurable differences in initiative and effort. To attribute this simply to an intrinsic effort derived from one's ethnicity is both distracting and essentially racist. More talk about white privilege, then, will only serve to discourage racial minorities from taking responsibility for their own situation - by providing a convenient target to blame.

6. Does race reflect a scientific reality of fundamental, scientific differences that reflect different kinds of people?

- *Yes, of course.* Fundamental and powerful differences between people are confirmed throughout extensive scientific literature. Anyone denying the same must have an agenda to minimize the role of race in society.
- *No.* While it's true there are broad genetic communalities among people whose ancestry traces back to the same region (ethnicity), science itself has confirmed only one race: *Homo sapiens sapiens*. In other words, our race is "human" (the human race) - one people in a big, wide, multi-ethnic world.

7. Do the events of American history suggest that issues of race can ultimately be overcome?

- While undeniable progress has been made, racism will likely always exist and is in our DNA as humans - and embedded in many institutions throughout America. American religious conservative faiths, for instance, reflect deep set prejudice and bias that is also hard to change.
- You bet. America has changed and will continue to change. 60% of Americans in 1960 say they would never vote for a black president and only 4% approved of black-white marriages in 1958 (87% now). There is every reason to expect further progress will continue - and we can move beyond this entirely.

8. Is more attention to race or racism helping or hurting America?

- *Definitely helping America.* Not talking about it doesn't suddenly make it go away. The challenges we are seeing with race were always under the surface, and are now finally being explored and addressed.
- *Definitely hurting it.* Americans seem more divided over race than ever before, surely in part linked to all the attention being given to the subject now?

9. What are the key steps towards addressing racial problems in America?

- More acknowledgement needs to be given towards race as a central reality in the lives of not only racial minorities - but in the larger society around them. As our sensitivity grows in this regards, additional progress can be made in structural and policy changes that remedy existing bias and inequity. Without these systemic changes, improvement in personal attitudes alone will never be sufficient.
- Rather than giving more attention to race, Americans need to be helped to move beyond race - and become color-blind in being "judged by the content of one's character more than the color of one's skin." Heightened attention to race will only set people on edge and predispose them towards offense and provocation. A better course would be to help cultivate attitudes of patience, charity and generosity throughout society.

10. **What other question should we address?