

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

# RACIAL SENSITIVITY

## From Awareness To Action

Kuheli Dutt

30 JUNE 2020

# Setting the Tone

- Race and Racism: exceptionally sensitive subjects. Some discomfort is normal – please stay engaged.
- Listen to understand, not to react or refute
- Racial bias awareness – first step
- Important: Commit to taking action
- Not a legal compliance/HR/EOAA training
- Racial bias in society: is a given
- Focus: how do we address systemic racism? Need to move from acknowledging the problem to taking ownership of it



Like so many of you, I'm pained by these recent tragedies. And I'm exhausted by a heartbreak that never seems to stop. Right now it's George, Breonna, and Ahmaud. Before that it was Eric, Sandra, and Michael. It just goes on, and on, and on. **Race and racism is a reality that so many of us grow up learning to just deal with. But if we ever hope to move past it, it can't just be on people of color to deal with it....**



*Pic: Getty Images*



It's up to all of us—Black, White, everyone—no matter how well-meaning we think we might be, to do the honest, uncomfortable work of rooting it out. It starts with self-examination and listening to those whose lives are different from our own. It ends with justice, compassion, and empathy that manifests in our lives and on our streets. I pray we all have the strength for that journey, just as I pray for the souls and the families of those who were taken from us."



*Pic: Getty Images*

~Michelle Obama

# Academia

- Rigid hierarchical structure
- Opaque decision-making processes; legal orientation
- Leadership: almost entirely White, mostly male
- Elements of power, privilege: dominant groups control the outcome(s) for marginalized groups
- Staggering levels of harassment, second only to the military
- Systemic racism/bias: deeply entrenched in all our processes and procedures
- System designed to protect the people in power
- Very few incidents rise to the top. Tip of the iceberg.



# Overt Vs. Covert Racism

## Overt Racism (Socially Unacceptable)

KKK The N-Word  
Swastikas

Lynching  
Hate crimes  
Racial Slurs

10%



Mass Incarceration

Racial Profiling

Police Brutality

Presumption of Guilt

Implicit bias

90%

Redlining

Housing Discrimination

Hiring Discrimination  
based on name

Racist jokes

## Covert Racism (Socially acceptable)

# Academia

Deeply entrenched biases  
against Blacks in academia

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



Alm  
Rep  
Adm  
Wome



# Grieving and frustrated: Black scientists call out racism in the wake of police killings



By Neil Gluckman | JUNE 03, 2020

Want to





# Key terms and concepts

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

# Key terms and concepts

- BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
- Black, Native/Indigenous: large scale/ mass trauma and oppression by White people
- Other POC: different challenges
  - Asians: perpetual foreigner
  - Hispanic/Latinx: More fluid concept of race



# Key terms and concepts

## Combined with Implicit Bias:

- White Privilege
  - White Fragility
  - White Comfort
  - Colorblind Racism
  - Whitesplaining
  - Racism Denial
- Affinity Bias
  - Stereotype Threat
  - Microaggressions
  - Intersectionality

# White Privilege

- White Privilege: Systemic advantage/benefit resulting from being White. Examples (Peggy McIntosh):
  - *I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.*
  - *When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.*
  - *Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.*



# White Fragility + White Comfort

- White Fragility: discomfort felt by White people when presented with information on racial injustice. Resentment at possibly being perceived as racist.
- White Comfort: entitlement to an absence of discomfort when talking about race. Wanting to shut down a conversation/ refusing to engage.

# Colorblind Racism + Whitesplaining

- Colorblind Racism: “I don’t see color”; “We’re all human”
- Well-intentioned but denies racial reality
- Whitesplaining: Explaining something about racism to a BIPOC, usually perceived as condescending.
- “I’m sure there’s another explanation”; “Maybe you’re just mistaken”
- Amounts to dismissal or outright denial of racism



# Affinity Bias

- Affinity Bias: Very powerful bias, rooted in natural instinct. Easy to perpetuate. “Feels natural”
- Instinctive tendency to prefer people like ourselves
- Babies as young as 6 months – 1 year old show preference for own race
- Not so much about who we harm as whom we try to help
- Not limited to race; can be professional/ personal affiliations; kinship; informal networks
- Mostly White leadership in academia: combination of affinity bias + systemic racism

# Affinity Bias

“Frankly, Dinsdale,  
we like the look of  
you”



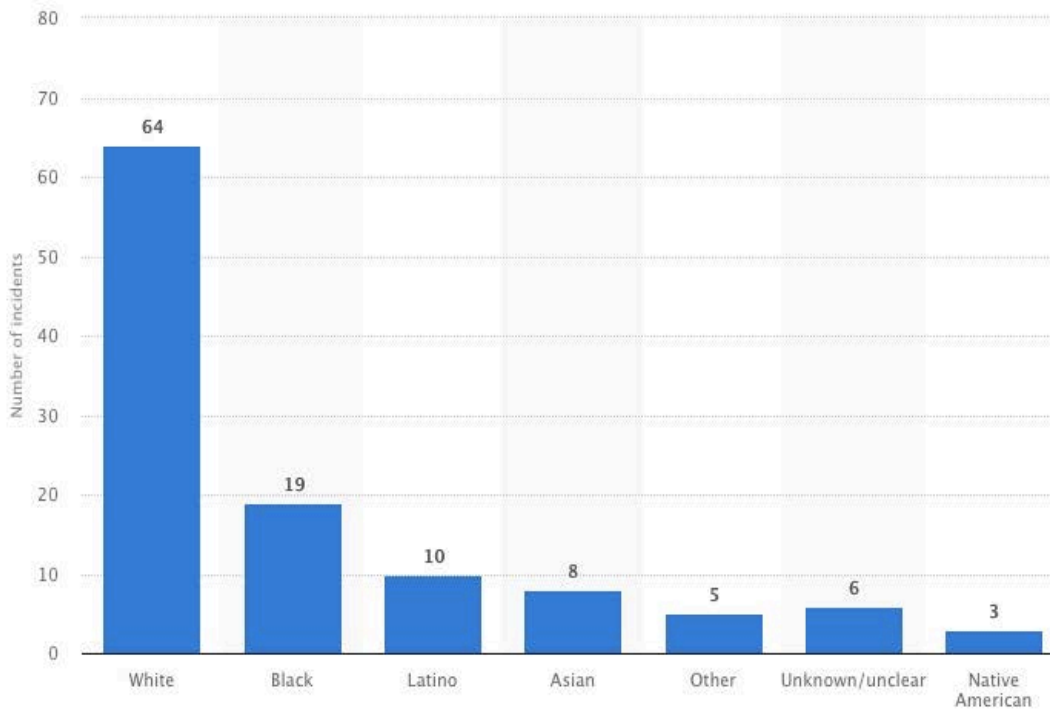


# Racial Stereotypes

- Blacks: “lacking academic brilliance”; “violent”
- Latino/a: “emotional”; “cleaning staff”
- Asians: “perpetual foreigners”; “model minority”
- Native Americans: “gambling”; “uncivilized”
- Absence of stereotyping: example of White privilege

# Mass Shootings in the US

Number of mass shootings in the United States between 1982 and December 2019, by shooter's race and ethnicity



## DOWNLOAD



PDF



XLS



PNG



PPT

## Source

[→ Show sources information](#)

[→ Show publisher information](#)

## Release date

December 2019

## Region

United States

## Survey time period

1982 to December 11, 2019

© Statista 2020

[Show source](#)

[Additional Information](#)



# Intersectionality

- Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw
- Multiple marginalized identities = most disadvantaged within society
- Hierarchy within groups:
- Feminist movement – mostly benefitted White women rather than women of color
- LGBTQ+ movement – benefitted White gay/lesbians
- Different realities: Cisgender, gender conforming, White gay man vs. Black transgender woman



*Pic: Columbia Univ*

# Intersectionality



Explore ▾

HRC Story

Local Issues

Support HRC

Blog ▾

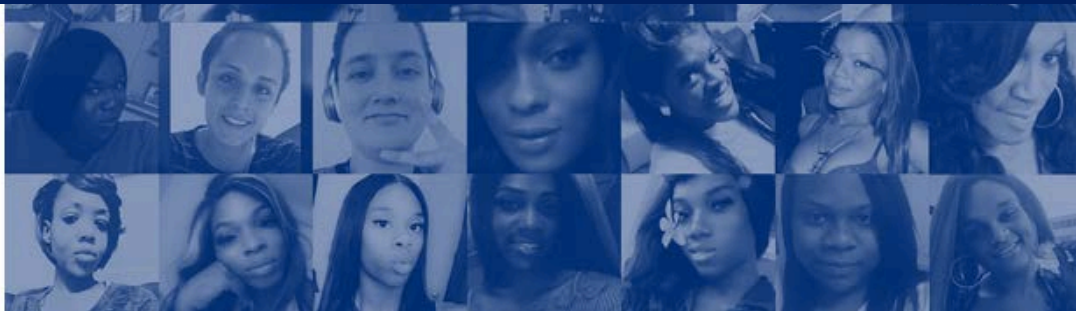
Election

“In 2019 at least 26\* transgender or gender nonconforming people were fatally shot or killed by other violent means”

\* very likely undercounted

“91% of them were Black women”

~Human Rights Campaign





# Reni Eddo Lodge: Intersectionality

## “Why I stopped talking to White people about race”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SynR1NYcpo>



# Microaggressions

- Can be intentional or unintentional
- Usually conveys negative meaning, even if well-intentioned, e.g., expressing surprise when BIPOC does well at something
- Checking wallet when a BIPOC passes by
- Following BIPOC around in a store
- Questioning financial reliability of BIPOC
- Not wanting to sit next to BIPOC in a bus/ train/ plane



# Examples of Racism

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

# Example 1

- Brent Staples: Black graduate student in Chicago's Hyde Park in the 1970s.
- Noticed that people avoided him, felt threatened by him. Ladies clutched purses tightly, people crossed the street when they saw him.
- Removed himself from the stereotype.
- Microaggression + Stereotype threat + White comfort



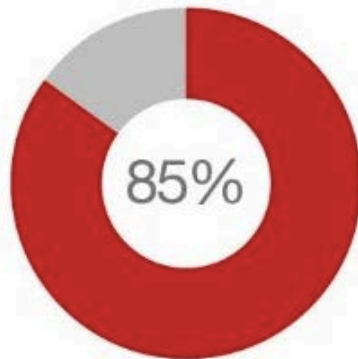
*Pic: Brent Staples*



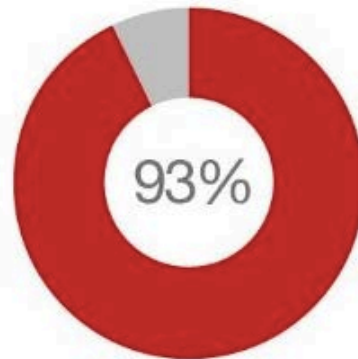
# Example 2

## 'PATTERN' OF DISCRIMINATION

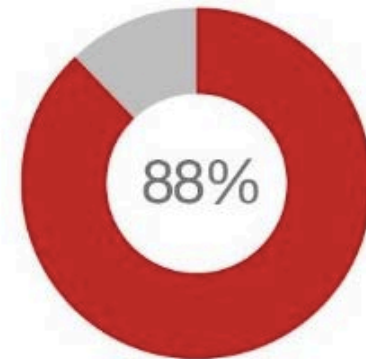
The Ferguson Police Department disproportionately targeted African-Americans for traffic stops, minor infractions and use of force, according to a Justice Department civil rights investigation. The population of Ferguson, Missouri, is 67% African-American.



African-Americans accounted for 85% of vehicle stops



93% of people arrested in Ferguson were African-American



African-Americans were subjects in 88% of cases involving use of force by police



SOURCE: U.S. Justice Department, 2012-2014

Stereotype Threat + Affinity Bias + Systemic Racism

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

# Example 3



*Pic: Univ. Missouri*

Stereotype Threat + Systemic Racism

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



Trigger Warning: The following slide contains information on violence.

## Example 4

George Washington University President:

“What if the majority of the students agreed to shoot all of the black people here? Do I say, ‘Ah, well, the majority voted?’ No.”



*Pic: George Washington Univ*

Systemic Racism + Microaggression+ Anti Blackness



# Common examples in academia

- Potential vs. Actual accomplishment
- “Wouldn’t clear a regular search; maybe we could do a diversity hire?”
- “We shouldn’t look at race or gender; we should just look at merit”
- Double jeopardy – extra scrutiny; “prove it again”
- “Race had nothing to do with it”
- “I want to be neutral here”

# Key terms and concepts

- White Fragility
  - White Comfort
  - Colorblind Racism
  - Racism Denial
  - Whitesplaining
  - White Privilege
  - Affinity Bias
  - Stereotype Threat
  - Microaggressions
  - Intersectionality
- 
- All these happen around us simultaneously!



# Combined effect? Enormous



Why is this so hard to fix?

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



# Why is this so hard to fix?

- Different lived realities. White people are far less likely to believe/acknowledge racial inequity than BIPOC.
- E.g., Male faculty in STEM tend to be more skeptical of gender bias research/evidence than others
- Fundamental disconnect between how BIPOC and White people view race
  - BIPOC: integral part of identity
  - White: incidental

# Why is this so hard to fix?

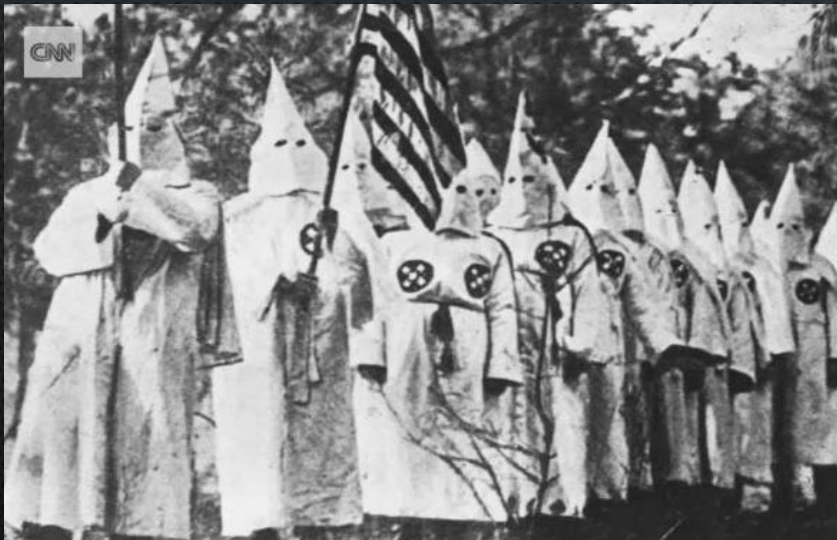
- US College Presidents Survey 2019: Only 25% felt that race relations on US college campuses in general were good
- 81% felt that race relations on their own campus were good or excellent
- Shifting the problem: individual, institutional
- University leadership: More than 80% White
- People in power – limited understanding of or perceived importance of race/ race relations
- Diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) work: often not prioritized by dominant groups



Why is it so hard to talk about  
racism?

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

# Why is it so hard to talk about racism?





# Why is it so hard to talk about racism?

- Sensitive subject –fear of being implicated
- “Racist” – ultimate insult for White people
- White people: conditioned not to talk about race. Knee-jerk discomfort.
- Fields with dominant White majority: Dismissal of racism

# Race Experiment: Talking About Race

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YX-i11IGj5w>





# Why is it so hard to talk about racism?

- Notion of "Whiteness" has evolved over time
- Italians, Irish, Jewish, Greek – all "became" White
- Each of these groups has known discrimination/ oppression
- Marginalized identities extend beyond race (religion, national origin, sexual/gender identity)
- You can still have White privilege while facing other challenges/ oppression
- Racism: contradicts concept of meritocracy

# Why is it so hard to talk about racism?

- White privilege most associated with: straight, cis-gender, White, Christian (usually male)
- Also the default image of an American. Whiteness = Americanness = Goodness
- Most other groups hyphenated or qualified: African-American, Jewish-American, Muslim-American, LGBTQ
- Anti-darkness/ anti-blackness usually prevails



# Why is it so hard to talk about racism?



Pic: Dreamstime

# Why is it so hard to talk about racism?

- Hispanic/Latinx: Language vs geographic region. Significant overlap.
- Race: more fluid concept than “Black” or “White”
- Mixed ancestry: Indigenous, White, Black
- US census: 48% Hispanics identified as White; 2% as Black; 6% as two+ races; 42% as “some other race”
- “Some other race” category: 97% identified as Latinx
- Whiteness: indicator of social and economic status
- Higher income, educated, citizen: more likely to identify as White



# Racism, Anti-Blackness, Anti-Darkness

- Racism rooted in anti-blackness; anti-darkness
- Stereotypical Black features = longer criminal sentences
- Lighter skin = more lenient prison sentence



*Pic: Thinkstock*



# Anti-Darkness Bias/ Light Skin Preference





# Systemic Racism vs. Prejudice

- Racism: systemic advantage based on race
- Distinguish between individual prejudice vs. systemic racism, i.e. disproportionate advantages that some groups (e.g., Whites) have over others
- Prejudice: happens across ALL groups, not just dominant groups/Whites. Research documents that marginalized groups/ BIPOC also hold prejudices.
- Even within marginalized groups: Blacks vs Asians vs Hispanics; even within own groups

# Picnic in the park?

- Ijeoma Oluo: Black, queer, female author – “So you want to talk about race”
- Raised in Seattle – mostly White environment
- Found Facebook group for people of color, felt like she finally found people she could relate to
- Went for a picnic in the park
- Everyone having a lovely time until...



*Pic: Wikipedia*



Examples closer home...

# Closer Home...

- Our own academic communities, racism rampant
- BIPOC don't feel comfortable discussing race with White colleagues.
- Some overt examples:
  - Faculty House:
  - Security guard(s):
  - Climbing stairs:
  - Conference:
- More subtle examples – numerous, everyday. Don't rise to the tip of the iceberg, but damaging all the same.



# Closer Home...

- Subtle but pervasive, damaging, repeated examples:
- Asked, “Are you lost?”
- Asked, “Do you have an appointment?”
- Biracial person told, “You’re not really Black”
- Black person made a suggestion during a group meeting; was ignored. White person made same suggestion -was acknowledged/praised.
- Black individuals frequently mistaken for each other
- “I feel othered here. Like I don’t belong here but just a space I am occupying”

Robin DiAngelo  
“Debunking common myths about racism”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjHg65JORi8>





So what can we do?

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

# So what can we do?

- Needs to be addressed on three levels :
- Individual level
- Departmental/ unit/ center level
- Institutional level



# So what can we do?

- Individual level:
- Accept that we are not objective, but subjective and not free from bias.
- Separate one's identity as White person from identity as good person
- Racism: systemic advantage, not a character defect
- Do a reality check with yourself: what have you actually done to combat racism?

# So what can we do?

- Individual level:
- Black community (especially Black women) hit by double whammy of Covid and social/racial injustice.
- How are we showing up for our BIPOC colleagues? Are we supporting them in a meaningful way?
- How do we talk about racism in a way that makes BIPOC feel seen and heard?
- Black Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter



# So what can we do?

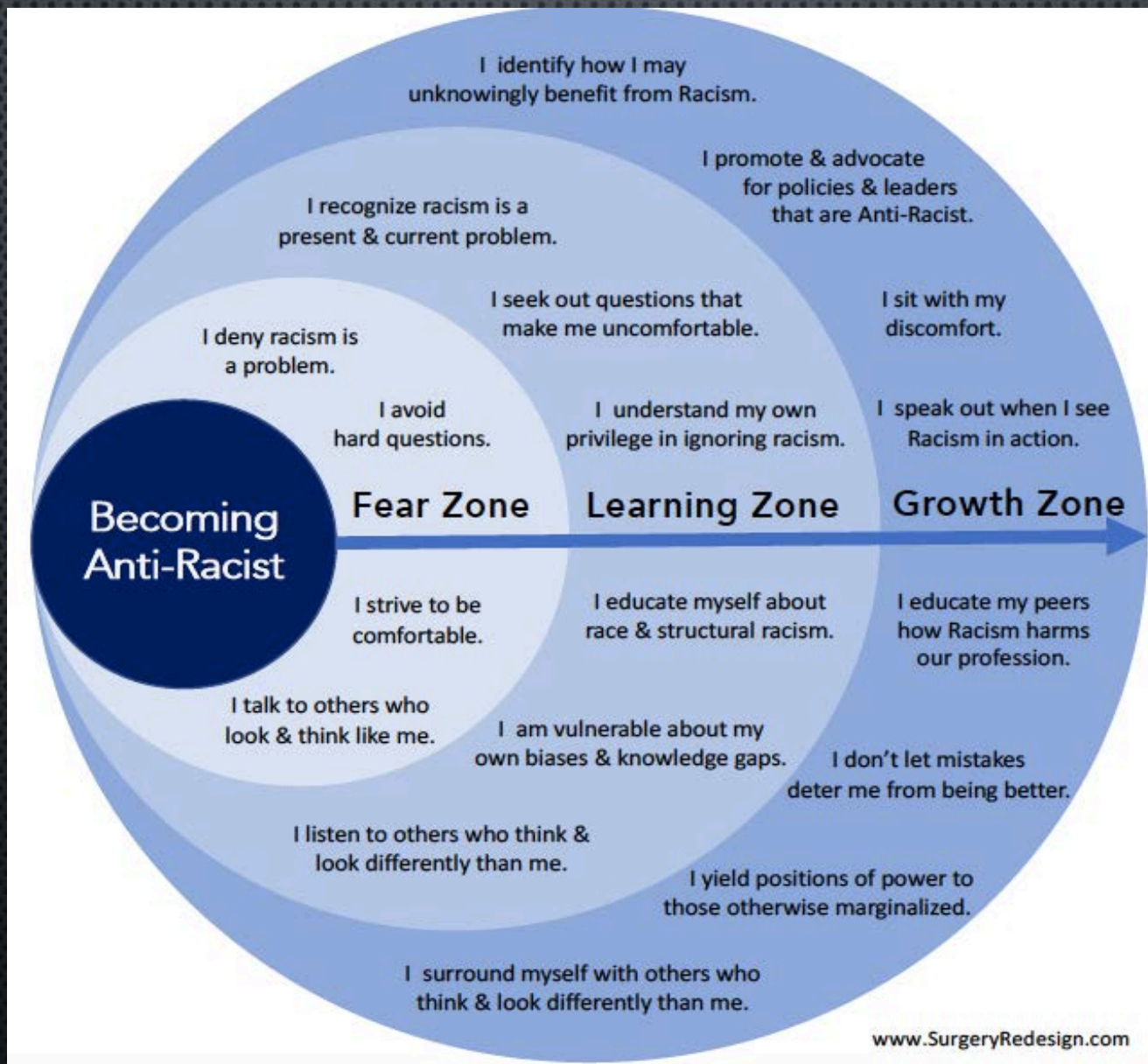
- Individual level:
- Look below the surface, into the deeper layers to better understand context
- Generational gap – give people the benefit of the doubt
- When invited to speak on a panel, ask for the panel composition and ask how many BIPOC are on it. Ask to know what efforts were made to invite BIPOC.

# So what can we do?

- Individual level:
- Talk to colleagues about race. If you're uncomfortable, start with talking to people of your own race.
- Acknowledge your implicit biases and try to consciously work on them. This is an ongoing process.
- Avoid putting minorities on the spot. Just like there is no single White opinion on race, there is no single Black or Native or Latinx or Asian opinion on race.



# Move from fear to learning to growth zone



# So what can we do?

- Departmental/unit/center level:
- Develop DEI action plan
- Do a salary equity study – share results with unit
- Invite students, postdocs, junior staff, admin to the table
- Diversity advocates on search committees
- Real acknowledgement of DEI work:
  - Revise promotion criteria to include DEI work. Main focus on publications; funding; classes taught; student evaluations; etc.
  - Compensation for DEI work wherever possible



# So what can we do?

- Departmental/unit/center level:
- Make a list of all the activities of your office/unit. How to incorporate anti-racism in each of those activities?
- Education/outreach; interacting with donors; group meetings; assigning tasks; inviting speakers; organizing events
- EI survey results – use to kickstart DEI efforts at your unit/center
- Very close link between academic affairs and DEI

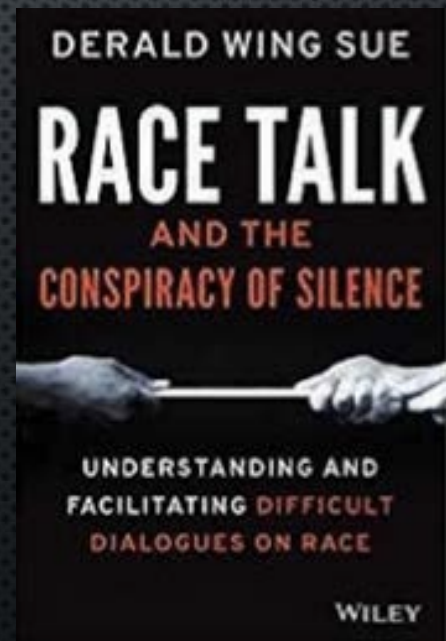
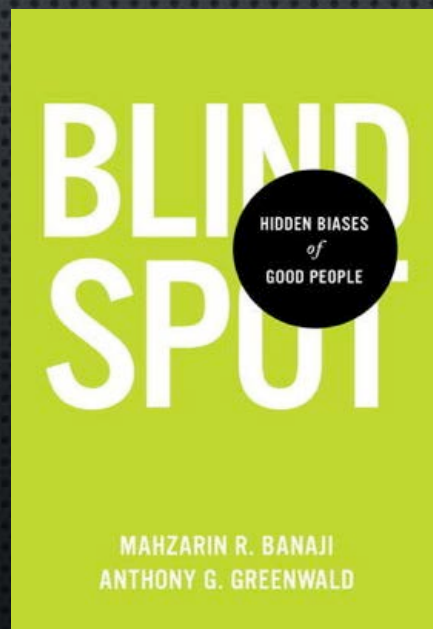
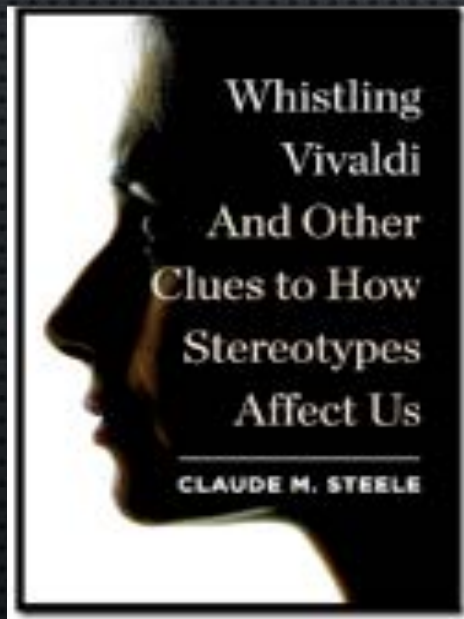
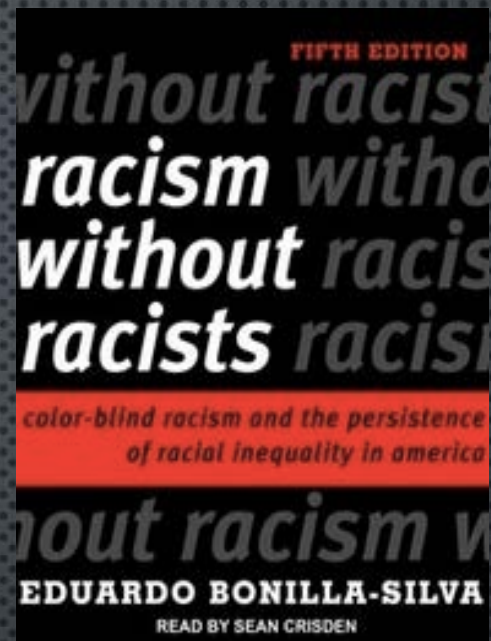
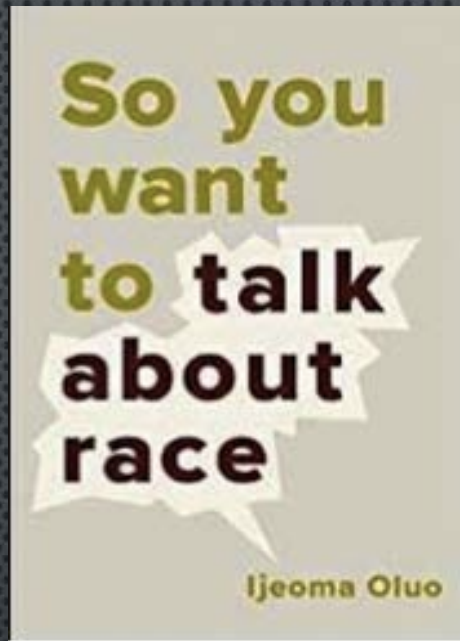
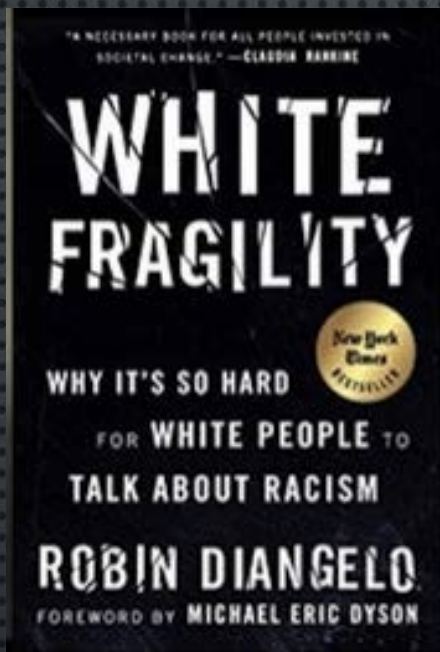
# So what can we do?

- Institutional level:
- Appoint BIPOC to leadership positions
- Very senior leadership in most universities (e.g., President's cabinet) almost entirely White. Need to acknowledge racial identities, not ignore them.
- Offices like OGC; EOAA; HR: Title IX: typically operate from a legal compliance standpoint. You should aim to rise above it and prioritize morality and antiracism.
- Remember: recent incidents are a symbol for and trigger of a much deeper pain, of old and new wounds

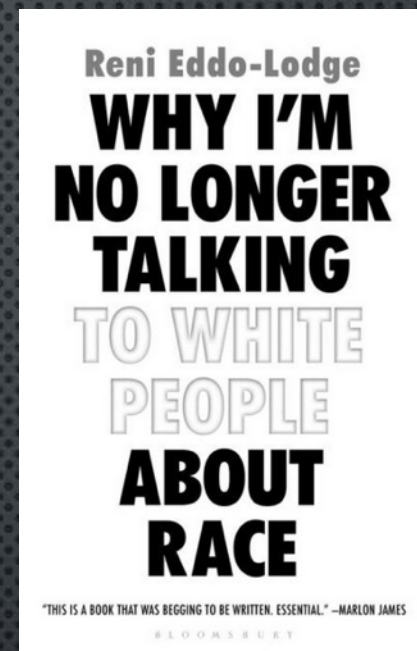
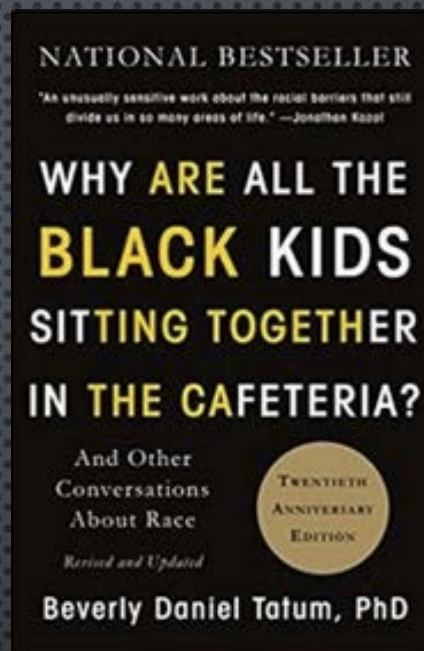
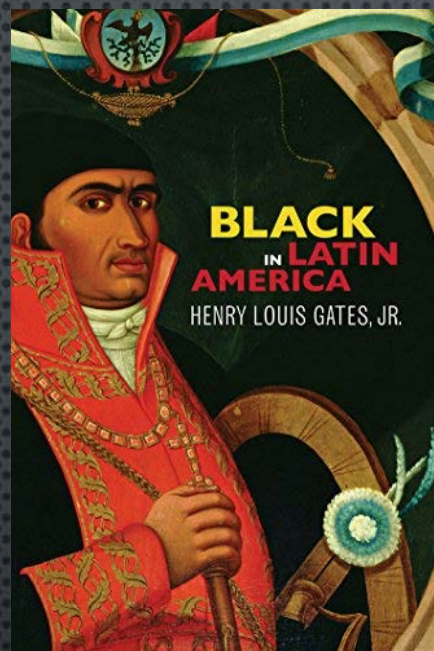
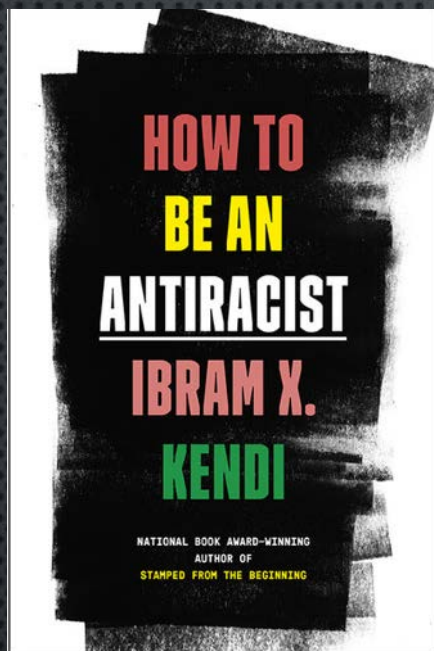


# Reading List

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY







Take the Implicit Association Test:  
<https://implicit.harvard.edu>

# White Silence

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

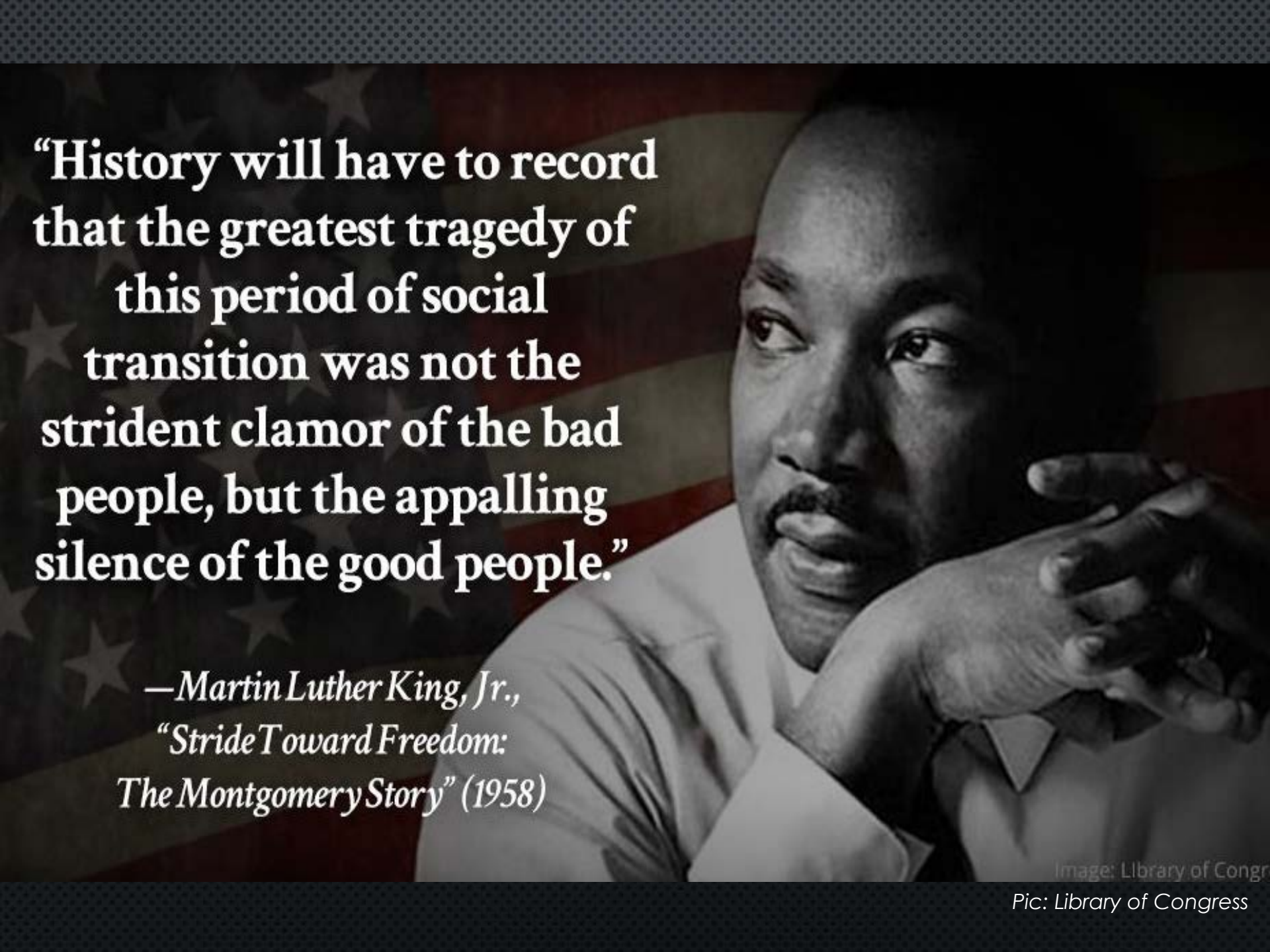


# White Silence

- White silence: sensitive and deeply painful subject
- White people typically unaware how painful the subject is
- Perceived by BIPOC as lack of caring from White people and/or complicity in White supremacy



Pic: Usagag.com



**“History will have to record  
that the greatest tragedy of  
this period of social  
transition was not the  
strident clamor of the bad  
people, but the appalling  
silence of the good people.”**

*—Martin Luther King, Jr.,  
“Stride Toward Freedom:  
The Montgomery Story” (1958)*

Image: Library of Congress

Pic: Library of Congress



# Thank You

Contact:

Kuheli Dutt: [kdutt@Ideo.columbia.edu](mailto:kdutt@Ideo.columbia.edu)

THE EARTH INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY