

seeing

white

ANTIRACISM LITERACY PARTNERS

A NEXT RIGHT ACTION

“Seeing White” Discussion Guide

General Discussion Guidelines

1. What is racism and antiracism? To begin your discussion, start with the same understanding of these terms. See “Being Antiracist” at the end of this reading guide.
2. Keep in mind that racism exists whether people are aware of it or not. A racial identification as white and privileged or as a person of color will affect our ability to see racism.
3. Speak to your own thoughts, behaviors, feelings, experience, and beliefs. Refrain from hopelessness and absolutes such as “Racism is never going to end,” or “I can’t do anything.”
4. Expect discomfort but avoid defensiveness. There is a difference between agreement and understanding; consider whether “I don’t agree” may actually mean “I don’t understand.”
5. Consider how your antiracism work furthers the values, mission, and ends of Unity Church-Unitarian, see at end of guide.
6. This guide is meant only to serve as a conversation starter. Feel free to create a format that works best for you, and create and discuss topics and questions as you think best.

Covenants

We will listen from the heart.

We will speak honestly from the heart about our own experience, not that of others.

We will respect the confidentiality of what is shared here.

We will not interrupt.

We will not give unasked-for advice.

We will not judge others by what they say.

We will honor the diversity of thoughts and feelings.

We will honor and respect our time together and our commitment to our learning partner.

Suggested 1-hour Discussion Format

5 min	Opening: Review of covenants
10 min	<i>Check-in.</i> What, briefly, is going on in your life today?
30 min	Discussion
10 min	<i>Check-out.</i> How are you feeling now?
5 min	Next discussion: where, when, scheduled on Zoom?

“Seeing White” Discussion Guide

“Seeing White” is season 2 of the podcast series “Scene on Radio.” Access the podcasts here:

<https://www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/>

About

Just what is going on with white people? Police shootings of unarmed African Americans. Acts of domestic terrorism by white supremacists. The renewed embrace of raw, undisguised white-identity politics. Unending racial inequity in schools, housing, criminal justice, and hiring. Some of this feels new, but in truth it’s an old story.

Why? Where did the notion of “whiteness” come from? What does it mean? What is whiteness for?

Scene on Radio host and producer John Biewen took a deep dive into these questions, along with an array of leading scholars and regular guest Dr. Chenjerai Kumanyika, in this fourteen-part documentary series, released between February and August 2017.

- **S2 E1: Turning the Lens**
Events of the past few years have turned a challenging spotlight on White people, and Whiteness, in the United States. An introduction to our series exploring what it means to be White. By John Biewen, with special guest Chenjerai Kumanyika.
- **S2 E2: How Race Was Made**
For much of human history, people viewed themselves as members of tribes or nations but had no notion of “race.” Today, science deems race biologically meaningless. Who invented race as we know it, and why? By John Biewen, with guest Chenjerai Kumanyika.
- **S2 E3: Made in America**
Chattel slavery in the United States, with its distinctive – and strikingly cruel – laws and structures, took shape over many decades in colonial America. The innovations that built American slavery are inseparable from the construction of Whiteness as we know it today. By John Biewen, with guest Chenjerai Kumanyika.
- **S2 E4: On Crazy We Built a Nation**
“All men are created equal.” Those words, from the Declaration of Independence, are central to the story that Americans tell about ourselves and our history. But what did those words mean to the man who actually wrote them? By John Biewen, with guest Chenjerai Kumanyika.
- **S2 E5: Little War on the Prairie**
Growing up in Mankato, Minnesota, John Biewen heard next to nothing about the town’s most important historical event. In 1862, Mankato was the site of the largest mass execution in U.S. history – the hanging of 38 Dakota warriors – following one of the major wars between Plains Indians and settlers.
- **S2 E6: That’s Not Us, So We’re Clean**
When it comes to America’s racial sins, past and present, a lot of us see people in one region of the country as guiltier than the rest. Host John Biewen spoke with some white Southern friends about that tendency. Part Six of our ongoing series, Seeing White. With recurring guest,

Chenjerai Kumanyika.

- [S2 E7: Chenjerai's Challenge](#)
“How attached are you to the idea of being white?” Chenjerai Kumanyika puts that question to host John Biewen, as they revisit an unfinished conversation from a previous episode. Part 7 of our series, Seeing White.
- [S2 E8: Skulls and Skin](#)
Scientists weren't the first to divide humanity along racial – and racist – lines. But for hundreds of years, racial scientists claimed to provide proof for those racist hierarchies – and some still do.
- [S2 E9: A Racial Cleansing in America](#)
In 1919, a white mob forced the entire black population of Corbin, Kentucky, to leave, at gunpoint. It was one of many racial expulsions in the United States. What happened, and how such racial cleansings became “America's family secret.”
- [S2 E10: Citizen Thind](#)
The story of Bhagat Singh Thind, and also of Takao Ozawa – Asian immigrants who, in the 1920s, sought to convince the U.S. Supreme Court that they were white in order to gain American citizenship. Thind's “bargain with white supremacy,” and the deeply revealing results
- [S2 E11: Danger](#)
For hundreds of years, the white-dominated American culture has raised the specter of the dangerous, violent black man. Host John Biewen tells the story of a confrontation with an African American teenager. Then he and recurring guest Chenjerai Kumanyika discuss that longstanding image – and its neglected flipside: white-on-black violence.
- [S2 E12: My White Friends](#)
For years, Myra Greene had explored blackness through her photography, often in self-portraits. She wondered, what would it mean to take pictures of whiteness? For her friends, what was it like to be photographed because you're white? With another conversation between host John Biewen and series collaborator Chenjerai Kumanyika.
- [S2 E13: White Affirmative Action](#)
When it comes to U.S. government programs and support earmarked for the benefit of particular racial groups, history is clear. White folks have received most of the goodies. By John Biewen, with Deena Hayes-Greene of the Racial Equity Institute and recurring series partner Chenjerai Kumanyika.
- [S2 E14: Transformation \(Seeing White, Part 14\)](#)
The concluding episode in our series, Seeing White. An exploration of solutions and responses to America's deep history of white supremacy by host John Biewen, with Chenjerai Kumanyika, Robin DiAngelo, and William “Sandy” Darity, Jr.

Discussion Questions

1. Chenjerai Kumanyika says that he hopes the Seeing White project will focus on systemic, structural racism, not individual bigotry or “race relations.” What does he mean? What's the difference? Can you give an example of each kind, individual and systemic racism? [Part 1]

2. John Biewen asks, Where did whiteness come from? What's the answer that he finds? [Part 2]
3. Who invented whiteness, and when? For what purpose? [Part 2]
4. Why would you say that race as we know it – “blackness,” “whiteness,” etc. – was not invented until the 15th century? [Part 2]
5. As American-style chattel slavery evolved into the 1700s, how was it different from the slavery practiced by the early British colonists? [Part 3]
6. When laws were changed in colonial America to give lower-class white people advantages over Africans, how did that make life easier for large landowners and other powerful white people? [Part 3]
7. American leaders assert almost universally that the words of the Declaration of Independence, “all men are created equal,” have been a consistent guiding principal in American life and law. Do you agree? [Part 4]
8. When the United States government acquired the land that became part of the state of Minnesota from the Dakota people, did it do so in an honest and respectful way? [Part 5]
9. What does philosopher Shannon Sullivan mean by “good white people?” [Part 6]
10. People in the American North often believe that the Civil War was a moral crusade in which the Union intervened to end slavery and “save” black people from bondage. Is this an accurate summary of what happened? [Part 6]
11. Scholar Dorothy Roberts says that race scientists of the 17th to 20th centuries used science to “confirm ... their reality.” What was the “reality” they were trying to confirm? [Part 8]
12. What does today's genomic science say about biological/genetic significance of “race”? [Part 8]
13. If the people of Minnesota, or of Corbin, Kentucky, prefer not to remember violent racial episodes in their region's past, why might that be? [Parts 5 and 9]
14. When it comes to defining whiteness, for determining American citizenship or other legal or social purposes, have the standards been consistent over the years? [Part 10]
15. When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the citizenship cases of Ozawa and Thind in 1922 and 1923, what was the one thing that remained consistent in the justices' rulings? [Part 10]
16. In telling the story of his encounter with “Michael” in Philadelphia, John Biewen says that, looking back, he was “pretty white” in some of this thinking at the time. What does he mean? [Part 11]
17. During the 400-year history in which people of European and African descent have lived in what is now the United States, which of those groups has committed more violence against the other? [Part 11]
18. Myra Greene talks about the “social context” of the history of photography, and “who controls what parts of the image.” What do you think she means by that? [Part 12]

19. Considering all racial and ethnic groups – white, black, Latino, Native American, Asian – which group has benefitted the most from government programs and largesse throughout American history? [Part 13]
20. In doing antiracist work, what is the difference between actions taken by individuals and those made by the society as a whole, through the federal government – and why might the latter be appropriate and necessary? [Part 14]

[From the Seeing White study guide. More questions for each episode are included—view here: http://www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/seeing-white-study-guide/](http://www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/seeing-white-study-guide/)

Our Next Right Action: Unity Church began exploring Our Next Right Action shortly after the killing of George Floyd. “Antiracism Literacy Partners” is one of several “next right actions.” Further education, advocacy, and lifestyle changes that shift our awareness and privilege are part of how we can sustain antiracism as a lifelong commitment. What next right actions might you take next?

From “Talking About Race,” National Museum of African American History & Culture: Being Antiracist

To create an equal society, we must commit to making unbiased choices and being antiracist in all aspects of our lives.

Race does not biologically exist, yet how we identify with race is so powerful, it influences our experiences and shapes our lives. In a society that privileges white people and whiteness, racist ideas are considered normal throughout our media, culture, social systems, and institutions. Historically, racist views justified the unfair treatment and oppression of people of color (including enslavement, segregation, internment, etc.). We can be led to believe that racism is only about individual mindsets and actions, yet racist policies also contribute to our polarization. While individual choices are damaging, racist ideas in policy have a wide-spread impact by threatening the equity of our systems and the fairness of our institutions. To create an equal society, we must commit to making unbiased choices and being antiracist in all aspects of our lives.

Being antiracist is fighting against racism. Racism takes several forms and works most often in tandem with at least one other form to reinforce racist ideas, behavior, and policy. Types of racism are:

- **Individual racism** refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism in conscious and unconscious ways. The U.S. cultural narrative about racism typically focuses on individual racism and fails to recognize systemic racism. *Examples include believing in the superiority of white people, not hiring a person of color because “something doesn’t feel right,” or telling a racist joke.*
- **Interpersonal racism** occurs between individuals. These are public expressions of racism, often involving slurs, biases, or hateful words or actions.
- **Institutional racism** occurs in an organization. These are discriminatory treatments, unfair policies, or biased practices based on race that result in inequitable outcomes for whites over people of color and extend considerably beyond prejudice. These institutional policies often never mention any racial group, but the intent is to create advantages. *Example: A school system where students of color are more frequently distributed into the most crowded classrooms and underfunded schools and out of the higher-resourced schools.*
- **Structural racism** is the overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society. These systems give privileges to white people resulting in disadvantages to people of color. *Example: Stereotypes of people of color as criminals in mainstream movies and media.*

No one is born racist or antiracist; these result from the choices we make. Being antiracist results from a conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily. These choices require ongoing self-awareness and self-reflection as we move through life. In the absence of making antiracist choices, we (un)consciously uphold aspects of white supremacy, white-dominant culture, and unequal institutions and society. Being racist or antiracist is not about who you *are*; it is about what you *do*.

Being Antiracist at the Individual and Interpersonal Level

When we choose to be antiracist, we become actively conscious about race and racism *and* take actions to end racial inequities in our daily lives. Being antiracist is believing that racism is everyone’s problem, and we all have a role to play in stopping it. In “The Racial Healing Handbook,” Dr. Anneliese

A. Singh reminds us of the importance of being purposeful: “You need the intentional mindset of *Yep, this racism thing is everyone’s problem-including mine, and I’m going to do something about it.*”

Being antiracist is different for white people than it is for people of color. For white people, being antiracist evolves with their racial identity development. They must acknowledge and understand their privilege, work to change their internalized racism, and interrupt racism when they see it. For people of color, it means recognizing how race and racism have been internalized, and whether it has been applied to other people of color.

All racial groups struggle under white supremacy. People of color groups are not always united in solidarity. People of color can act by challenging internalized white supremacy and interrupting patterns of prejudice against other racial groups. For everyone, it is an ongoing practice and process.

Accessed Sept 1, 2020: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist>

Unity Church-Unitarian Values, Mission, and Ends

Values

Unity Church-Unitarian honors the ambiguity and uncertainty in the search for greater truth, meaning, and equity. In all we do, we strive to embody:

- Wonder
- Open-hearted engagement
- Courageous action

Mission

Unity Church-Unitarian fosters transformation through a free and inclusive religious community that encourages lives of integrity, service, and joy.

Ends Statements 2018-2023

Working within ourselves, among our church community, and beyond in the larger world, we the people of Unity Church-Unitarian:

- Create a multicultural spiritual home built on authentic relationships.
- Ground ourselves in personal practice and communal worship that grows our capacity for wonder and spiritual deepening.
- Articulate our Unitarian Universalist faith identity, teach it to our children, share it with others, and live it courageously in the world.
- Know each other in all our fullness and create an ever-widening circle of belonging for all people.
- Generously give and openly receive compassionate care in times of joy, sorrow, and transition.
- Discover and pursue our individual and collective work to advance justice, wholeness, and equity for people, our Earth, and all life on it.
- Create brave space for racial healing and dismantling dominant culture.
- Sustain and steward the church and our larger Unitarian Universalist movement for the future.

Accessed 8.29.20: <https://www.unityunitarian.org/values-mission-ends.html>

Covenants adapted from UU Small Group Ministry Network, accessed 8.29.20:

<http://www.smallgroupministry.net/public/covenants.html>