

DISCUSSION GUIDE

for

Towards the "Other America": Anti-Racist Resources for White People Taking Action for Black Lives Matter



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Guiding Themes and Discussion Questions

The following suggested themes and questions are designed to help you plan a one-time discussion event or ongoing series about *Towards the 'Other America'*. The possibilities are endless as to how you can organize events around the book to build the movement for collective liberation. Consider this guide just a launching pad for where you might go, and be creative and conscious about where your people are, who they are, and their needs and interests.

Be sure to include concrete action steps for people to get their bodies and communities in motion for racial justice. Better yet, find ways to take action together as a discussion group (attending a local protest, holding a "standout" with Black Lives Matter signs after the book group, etc). The movement needs us now, and the insights in the book will best be understood if read side by side with taking action.

Theme: Why do we fight? Locating white mutual interest in Black liberation

❖ Suggested book contents:

- We Must Awaken the Souls of White People to Resist White Supremacy
- Ending White Supremacy Is in Everyone's Interest: An Interview with Meta Mendel-Reyes of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth
- Unleashing Rage and Yearning for Liberation: The Real Lessons of Dr. King for Urban Uprisings
- "Which Side Are You On?": An Interview with Liz Perlman and Seth Newton Patel of AFSCME Local 3299 on Racial Justice Organizing in the Labor Movement
- "To Nourish and Sustain Us": A Poem on the Third Anniversary of Trayvon Martin's Murder
- "For White Anti-Racist Leadership and a World Where Black Lives Matter: The Purpose of this Book"
- Being a Good Ally is Not the Goal

❖ Suggested discussion questions

- What does "mutual interest" mean to you?
- What are examples from *Towards the 'Other America'* that changed your perspective on white mutual interest in Black Liberation?
- In your family or community, how do you see racism dividing white people from their black and brown counterparts to keep wealth in the hands of tiny elites?
- How do you see white supremacy affecting white communities on a spiritual and cultural level?

Theme: "All lives matter" vs. "Black lives matter"

❖ Suggested book contents:

- The Heart of Black Lives Matter and Why “All Lives Matter” Is Part of the Problem
- How "All Lives Matter" Is Vandalizing Our Theology and Values
- Together We Will Find the Way: An Interview with DrewChristopher Joy of the Southern Maine Workers’ Center
- We Must Weather the Storm to See the Rainbow: An Open Love Letter to White Unitarian Universalists (and Other White People Too) Struggling with Their Commitment to Black Lives Matter

❖ Suggested discussion questions:

- When you hear the phrase “All Lives Matter”, how do you feel and react?
- According to *Towards the ‘Other America’*, how does the phrase “All Lives Matter” work to undermine the demands of collective liberation?
- How has the conflict over Black Lives Matter/All Lives Matter showed up in your dialogues with people in your community?
- How would you respond to someone using the “All Lives Matter” argument in order to invite them into the struggle for racial justice?

Theme: Understanding white supremacy

❖ Suggested book contents:

- Beyond Bad Apples: For a New Ecosystem of Collective Liberation
- Anti-Black Racism, the Minstrel Show, and the Making of Whiteness
- Racist Policing Is About Ruling Class Power and Black Liberation Means We All Get Free
- Ending White Supremacy Is in Everyone’s Interest: An Interview with Meta Mendel-Reyes of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth
- “Towards the ‘Other America’”

❖ Suggested discussion questions:

- When you hear “white supremacy”, what first comes to mind?
- For many, events in the news about racism are not the products of a racist system but of a “few bad apples.” What is the difference between individual prejudice and systemic racism against people of color?
- If you are white, what were opportunities and benefits that you and/or your family had because they are white?
- How is white supremacy used as a tool of capitalism to break down class solidarity?
- According to *Towards the ‘Other America’* and your own perspectives and experiences, how does fighting for Black Lives Matter get white people free too?

Theme: Intersectionality: Prioritizing queer, woman, and working class leadership

❖ Suggested book contents:

- Together We Will Find the Way: An Interview with Drew Christopher Joy of the Southern Maine Workers' Center
- "We're Building a Movement with the 'Young Gifted and Black Coalition' in the Lead": An Interview with Z! Haukeness on White Racial Justice Organizing in Madison, Wisconsin
- "Let's Get Free": An Interview with Kate Shapiro of Southerners on New Ground (SONG)
- Ending White Supremacy Is in Everyone's Interest: An Interview with Meta Mendel-Reyes of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth

❖ Suggested discussion questions:

- How has your gender identity, sexuality and class background affected your experience of being white or a person of color?
- Why is it important to support the leadership of queer people and women in the struggle for collective liberation?
- Why is working class leadership important in the struggle for collective liberation?
- How can we foster more intersectional approaches to organizing for racial justice, and what tips did you pick up on in *Towards the 'Other America'* that have been overlooked in your movements?

Theme: Breaking white silence

❖ Suggested book contents:

- Notes for a White Anti-Racist Struggling with White Friends about the Baltimore Uprising
- Every White Person Is Aiding and Abetting Terrorism Unless Naming Institutional and Cultural White Supremacy in Charleston Massacre
- Notes to a White Anti-Racist Group Organizing Community Discussions with White People About Black Lives Matter
- Notes to a White Anti-Racist Struggling with White Resistance in His Mostly White Church to Black Lives Matter
- Notes to a White Activist Working in a Majority White Multi-Issue Group, Getting Push Back from White Director About Making Racial Justice a Focus of the Organization's Social Media

❖ Suggested discussion questions:

- What are times when you regret you did not show up or speak up for racial justice? What held you back, and what might have made the situation different?
- What kinds of reactions have there been when you have taken action or spoken up against racism? How did these reactions make you feel?

- What examples are there in *Towards the 'Other America'* of the balance between white people “stepping back” and the need to break white silence?
- What barriers exist to breaking the silence about racism in white communities?

Theme: Taking action: planning campaigns and action

❖ Suggested book contents:

- Building Power for Racial Justice in White Communities: From Awareness of White Privilege to Anti-Racist Organizing
- Notes for White Anti-Racists Who Want to Build Movement for Black Liberation and Collective Liberation
- Victories Belong to the People: On May Day and Everyday
- Rising Up to the Challenges of Our Time: An Interview with Zoë Williams on White Racial Justice Organizing in Denver, Colorado
- “By the Strengths of All of Our Ancestors”: An Interview with Dove Kent of Jews For Racial and Economic Justice in New York City

❖ Suggested discussion questions:

- What policies are in place in your local municipality, region, or state that support white supremacy?
- Who benefits from these policies and where do they get their power?
- What did you learn from *Towards the 'Other America'* that can help transform the national momentum around Black Lives Matter into long-term, sustainable campaigns for policy changes in your area?
- What are the challenges that get in the way of building and maintaining long-term campaigns for action on racial justice?

Theme: Accountability to People of Color-led organizing

❖ Suggested book contents:

- “By the Strengths of All of Our Ancestors”: An Interview with Dove Kent of Jews For Racial and Economic Justice in New York City
- “Let’s Get Free”: An Interview with Kate Shapiro of Southerners on New Ground (SONG)
- Answering the Call: White People Showing Up for Racial Justice: An Interview with Carla Wallace, Dara Silverman and Sam Hamlin of the Showing Up for Racial Justice Network

❖ Suggested discussion questions:

- According to *Towards the 'Other America'*, what does “accountability” mean and why is it important?
- What practices did you read about to build accountability to organizing led by people of color?

- What challenges get in the way of white people building accountability with people of color-led organizing?
- If you are white, what experiences have you had where accountability to people of color-led organizing has been strong and successful? When has it failed?

Theme: Mistakes, white fragility, and moving past fears

❖ Suggested book contents:

- For Michael Brown and Ferguson: Facing White Fears of Blackness and Taking Action to End White Supremacy
- To the White Anti-Racists Who Are Nervous About Stepping Up Against Racism
- Notes to a White Anti-Racist on Struggling to Find Her Place to Speak Out, Because She Doesn't Want to Speak for People of Color
- We Must Weather the Storm to See the Rainbow: An Open Love Letter to White Unitarian Universalists (and Other White People Too) Struggling with Their Commitment to Black Lives Matter
- For Activists Devastated and Feeling Defeated by Racist Violence

❖ Suggested discussion questions:

- What fears or insecurities do you have about speaking up or taking action against racism?
- What has helped you move through fears and insecurities?
- What does “Take space to make space” mean to you, and how does it make you feel?
- If you are white, how have you experienced “white fragility” when making mistakes in work for racial justice, and how have you found strength?

Theme: Theology and Religious Leadership for Black Lives Matter Times

❖ Suggested book contents:

- Notes for White Religious Leaders Who Want to Turn White Faith Communities into Spiritual Strongholds for Racial Justice
- For a Theology of Liberation: An Interview with Rev. Ashley Horan of the Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance
- How "All Lives Matter" Is Vandalizing Our Theology and Values
- Throwing Down Against White Supremacy Is Sacred Work: An Interview with Rev. Anne D. Dunlap of United Church of Christ
- An Anti-Racist Vision for White and Majority White Faith Communities

❖ Suggested discussion questions:

- Why is it important that faith communities be involved in the struggle against white supremacy?
- What values, stories, scriptures or theologies from your faith tradition ground the work for racial justice?

- What resources (prayers, songs, spiritual practices, etc) from your faith tradition can lend resilience to the movement?
- How have you experienced pushback or reluctance in your faith community to talking about racism or taking action for Black Lives Matter?

Theme: Building powerful, loving, resilient anti-racist relationships with white people

❖ Suggested book contents:

- Together We Will Find the Way: An Interview with Drew Christopher Joy of the Southern Maine Workers' Center
- Throwing Down Against White Supremacy Is Sacred Work: An Interview with Rev. Anne D. Dunlap of United Church of Christ
- Answering the Call: White People Showing Up for Racial Justice: An Interview with Carla Wallace, Dara Silverman and Sam Hamlin of the Showing Up for Racial Justice Network
- For a Theology of Liberation: An Interview with Rev. Ashley Horan of the Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance
- Notes to a Veteran White Anti-Racist Activist on Cynicism as New White People Join the Movement for Black Lives Matter
- Notes to a Comrade on Using the Buddy System to Bring New People in and Build Up a Local Anti-Racist/Collective Liberation Organization

❖ Suggested discussion questions:

- *Towards the 'Other America'* talks a lot about “loving on” white people while working with your whole being against white supremacy. What do you understand this to mean, and why is it important?
- What can be gained from mobilizing white people who are already listening or sympathetic rather than working to convince people who will never agree with you?
- How have you seen the effects of “call-out” culture damaging white anti-racist efforts? What is an alternative?
- What are practices for creating more loving, resilient relationships with white people to help strengthen work for racial justice? What stands in the way?

Theme: Staying strong: preventing burnout/fadeout

❖ Suggested book contents:

- We Must Weather the Storm to See the Rainbow: An Open Love Letter to White Unitarian Universalists (and Other White People Too) Struggling with Their Commitment to Black Lives Matter
- For a Theology of Liberation: An Interview with Rev. Ashley Horan of the Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance
- Throwing Down Against White Supremacy Is Sacred Work: An Interview with Rev. Anne D. Dunlap of United Church of Christ
- “To Nourish and Sustain Us”: A Poem on the Third Anniversary of Trayvon Martin’s Murder

➤ For Activists Devastated and Feeling Defeated by Racist Violence

❖ Suggested discussion questions:

- What tensions have you experienced between self-care and showing up for racial justice?
- What practices do you have to take care of your physical, mental, and spiritual health in the face of stress or trauma?
- What are three factors or trigger points that contribute to you feeling like you want to leave the work for racial justice?
- What are three factors or points of motivation that make you want to stay in the work for racial justice?
- Who are your movement “superheroes” or role models who inspire you to be powerful for racial justice and who you can learn from?

Book Discussion Template for Faith Communities

The following is a suggested agenda for a book discussion of *Towards the Other America*. It can be adapted into a one-time event or whole discussion series based on the guiding themes and discussion questions. Like with the themes and questions, this agenda is not a rulebook, but a place to start, mix and match from.

1. Start with prayer, song, ritual, poem or scripture reading to create/acknowledge sacred space. Share how the discussion is grounded in your tradition's faith values.
2. Introductions - ask people to introduce themselves in a group go-around or in 1:1 pairs. Invite people to share about what brings them there, how they have taken action for BLM/racial justice in the past, and/or what questions they bring to the discussion.
3. Discuss book excerpt related to chosen theme. Read parts aloud to get conversation flowing. Pick from the listed discussion questions and/or ask what moves people, stands out to them, and how it relates to their experiences.
4. Express gratitude for people showing up, learning, and sharing. Invite them to name what actions they plan to take for racial justice based on the conversation, and have resources ready from Black Lives Matter, SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice), or local organizing groups to plug people into action.
5. Invite people to a public display of support for Black Lives Matter following the discussion, such as a stand-out in the neighborhood with Black Lives Matter signs, door knocking, or give people Black Lives Matter buttons to wear in the time between the next meeting.
6. Close with a prayer or ritual of commitment/recommitment to the movement.

Tips for Facilitators:

- Assign different roles to people who step up to lead with you, including someone to lead prayers or faith reflection, note-taker, and a time-keeper to make sure you get to all the important pieces and end on time.
- As a discussion facilitator, listen well and affirm the experiences of people in your group. Celebrate how they are showing up for racial justice, show that you believe in them if they doubt themselves. Share about your own insecurities or mistakes in the work so as to invite others to be vulnerable in sharing about theirs.
- If your discussion is with a ministry group or organization that is already active in Black Lives Matter movement or other racial justice efforts and has collective memory together: Keep a record of what people are wrestling with and lessons for the work. Consider having the group process previous organizing experiences with a lens from the book, or apply them to a current issue/problem in the group or an upcoming campaign/action.

Book Discussion Template for Secular Organizations

The following is a suggested agenda for a book discussion of *Towards the Other America*. It can be adapted into a one-time event or whole discussion series based on the guiding themes and questions listed in the guiding themes and discussion questions. Like with the themes and questions, this agenda is not a rulebook, just a place to start, mix and match from.

1. Start with a poem, story, or personal sharing to ground the meeting in the organization's mission and values, and what the intentions are for how the discussion can move your work forward.
2. Introductions - ask people to introduce themselves in a group go-around or in 1:1 pairs. Invite people to share about what brings them there, how they have taken action for BLM/racial justice in the past, and/or what questions they bring to the discussion.
3. Discuss book excerpt related to chosen theme. Read parts aloud to get conversation flowing. Pick from the listed discussion questions and/or ask what moves people, stands out to them, and how it relates to their experiences.
4. Express gratitude for people showing up, learning, and sharing. Invite them to name what actions they plan to take for racial justice based on the conversation, and have resources ready from Black Lives Matter, SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice), or local organizing groups to plug people into action.
5. Invite people to a public display of support for Black Lives Matter following the discussion, such as a standout in the neighborhood with Black Lives Matter signs, door knocking, or give people Black Lives Matter buttons to wear in the time between the next meeting.

Tips for Facilitators:

- Assign different roles to people who step up to lead with you, including a note-taker, and a time-keeper to cover make sure you get to all the important pieces and end on time. Depending on how much time you have, choose how much time you will spend on each piece of the agenda.
- As a discussion facilitator, listen well and affirm the experiences of people in your group. Celebrate how they are showing up for racial justice, show that you believe in them if they doubt themselves. Share about your own insecurities or mistakes in the work so as to invite others to be vulnerable in sharing about theirs.
- If your discussion is with an organization that is already active in Black Lives Matter movement or other racial justice efforts, and has collective memory together: Keep a record of what people are wrestling with and lessons for the work. Consider having the group process previous organizing experiences with a lens from the book, or apply them to a current issue/problem in the group or an upcoming campaign/action.