

ANTI-RACISM ACTIONS FOR WHITE FOLKS: LESSONS FROM IJEOMA OLUO'S BOOK

Ralph Bangs, Ph.D.

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About Ijeoma Oluo, writer, speaker, and “internet yellor.”

- Website: <http://www.ijeomaoluo.com/>
- Follow her on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/IjeomaOluo>
- She talks about her book (approx. 50 mins):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnybJZRWipg>

This workshop is designed to start an informed conversation about the ways in which people of color (POC) are harmed at the individual, interpersonal, and structural levels by white people who remain oblivious to their privilege. This harm occurs every minute of every day, such as through microaggressions, denial of housing and jobs, poor education, incarceration, and murder.

Why focus on whites? First, past and present discrimination by whites against POC is the main reason for racial problems in America today. Further, as MLK said, racism will not end until white people become outraged about the injustices it begets. Racism won't stop until white people stop it.

I was inspired to facilitate this workshop after reading and teaching Ijeoma Oluo's book, hearing the author's lecture at CMU, and talking with her. She wrote the book because she found that most white people do not understand race and do not know how to talk about it. I encourage everyone to read the book.

Today we will focus on **anti-racism actions** for whites that I have derived from the chapters in her text. We will start by viewing part of Oluo's video and discussing anti-racism actions from her Introduction. Then I will present two or three chapters at a time, and we will have small group discussions, followed by sharing rounds with the whole group.

One absolute rule: Do not use the “n” word in this workshop.



Oluo's suggestions for further reading:

- Octavia Butler's fiction
- Beverly Tatum's *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race* (2017 edition)
- Bob Suzuki on the model minority myth (1997, 2002)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates' books
- Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*
- Kimberlé Crenshaw on intersectionality
- *Binti* (science fiction novella by Nnedi Okorafo)
- *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo

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University Center for
Teaching and Learning
University of Pittsburgh
Alumni Hall
4227 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
Phone: 412-624-3335
Email: teaching@pitt.edu



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WHITES REGARDING PEOPLE OF COLOR (POC)

CONTENT: INTRODUCTION

View Part of Oluo's Video

Introduction. Overview of topics to be covered in the book

	DO	DON'T
Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discard Western ideals of beauty as the norm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask POC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Why their skin color is that way o Where they came from - Comment on POC's shape, hair, or lips
Fair treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pay POC the same wages as their white counterparts in the same job - Make sure taxi, Uber, and Lyft drivers serve POC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow POC around in a store - Tell POC there are no job or housing openings when there are - Stop POC for driving while black or brown
Social interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learn about and discuss race - Be aware that discussing or reading about race can bring up the trauma of experiences with racism for POC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assume black boys are violent, rough, or older than they are - Tell racist jokes - Say POC are too sensitive, loud, negative, abrasive, or confrontational - Expect POC to educate you about race - Assume that POC can ignore race

Discussion Round 1

1. What is your reaction to my initial comments, Ms. Oluo's video, and the anti-racism actions from the Introduction, such as what was not clear, what did you find most important, etc.?
2. How are POC treated in this university, city, country?

How do whites treat POC?

3. How might we use this video in our university?

CONTENT: CHAPTERS 1 & 2

Chapter 1. Is it really about race?

	DO	DON'T
Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Believe a POC when they say an event is racist - Know that racial disparities almost always indicate racism - Realize that racism impacts nearly every aspect of our lives - Acknowledge that the problems of POC require different conversations and treatment than the conditions of whites - Recognize that discussing racism against POC does not diminish the problems of whites (i.e., Black Lives Matter) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dismiss the importance of race just because it is a social construct - Discount race just because white people are also killed, poor, unemployed, etc. - Minimize racial problems just because there are some successful POC - Assume that one racist event is all that hurts POC at that moment - Write off race just because class, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity matter - Discredit POC just because their lived experience is different from yours
Class & Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help unlock the institutional racism that keeps POC in the bottom of the economic system - Recognize that it is unfair for POC to get fewer resources so whites can get more - Know that the system that keeps whites poor does not include the racism that keeps POC poor (concentrated poverty) - Understand that this system has had the effect of making white people feel superior because they get more resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assert that race doesn't matter since class explains racial differences
Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Realize that policies to help the working class, such as higher minimum wages or stronger unions, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Argue that policies should help all people first and then address race

	DO	DON'T
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are insufficient to end racial disparities - Increase investment in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods 	
Fair treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give people a job interview even if they have black, brown, or Asian-type names - Protest the locking up of large numbers of black and Latino men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Charge POC higher mortgage rates - Target POC for predatory loans - See children of color as violent or aggressive and suspend or expel students of color at high rates

Chapter 2. What is racism?

	DO	DON'T
Racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand that racism is any prejudice against someone because of their race and that it is reinforced by systems of power - Know that racist views by whites are a problem because they are used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Justify not hiring POC o Denying housing o Discriminating in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refer to black-on-black crime to dismiss the problem of whites killing black people - Think that racism is just about the KKK, Nazis, Neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and white nationalists - Use monkeys or other racist references - Associate with subtle racists, such as people who say that Obama is a Muslim or was not born in America - Support elected officials who use dog whistles to get white support, such as talking about “problem neighborhoods,” “law and order,” and “cleaning up the streets”
Basic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledge that all poor people, including POC, deserve to have a roof over their heads and food for their children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Require drug tests to get welfare - Say POC have more children to get higher welfare benefits or that women of color should be sterilized
Social interaction		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Say “people like you” or “those people” - Say POC need to be less angry

	DO	DON'T
Anti-racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on changing the system, not just the hearts and minds of white people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Race greatly affects health, life expectancy, infant mortality, wealth, income, and much more - Call people out when they make racist statements, and then link that attitude to system racism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Try to get white people to love POC, as this won't do anything about police brutality, racial income inequality, food deserts, or the prison-industrial complex

Discussion Round 2

1. What do you think about the anti-racism actions for whites from these chapters, such as what was not clear, what did you find most important, etc.?
2. In your classes, how do you make use, or could you make use of the lived experiences of students of color and other information from these chapters?
3. How else can we use this information in our university?

CONTENT: CHAPTERS 3, 4, 5 & 6

Chapter 3. What if I talk about race wrong?

	DO	DON'T
Social relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognize that many whites are more racist towards darker-skinned POC - Realize that many whites discount or ignore the whiteness of mixed-race POC - Acknowledge that it is difficult for many POC to get through a day due to mistreatment by whites (impact on mental health) - Fight all types of oppression, not just racism - Be considerate and civil towards POC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be mean to POC - Tell jokes meant to be for POC - Think you know what it means to be a POC
Tips for talking about race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inform yourself about race <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Do your research! - Focus on systemic racism - When talking about race with POC, focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Understanding racism better o Addressing a racial incident o Righting a wrong caused by racism - Apologize to POC if necessary - Talk about race even if you don't want to - Discuss race with people of your own race 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Force POC to discuss race with you - Police the tone of a conversation - Get defensive
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schedule parent-teacher meetings when parents won't need to miss work 	

Chapter 4. Why am I always being told to check my privilege?

	DO	DON'T
Race, class & privilege	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Talk about all classes, education levels, genders, sexualities, ethnicities, and abilities, when talking about POC- Be aware that privilege is a set of advantages that you have, and others don't- Use your privilege to change the system and give others your advantages (seat at the table, jobs, wages, benefits)- Fight for all types of disadvantaged people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Say to people "check your privilege"- Assume all your success is simply due to your own effort

Chapter 5. What is intersectionality and why do I need it?

	DO	DON'T
Anti-racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Care about the special problems of women of color- Fight violence against women of color, even if the violence is by men of color- Rely on intersectionality to deal with those different from yourself. Ask yourself: How does race, gender, sexuality, ability, or class impact people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Be a color-blind feminist that only cares about women in general- Hate women of color who publicly oppose violent or predatory men of color

Chapter 6. Is police brutality really about race?

	DO	DON'T
Police brutality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Know that racism occurs when police stop, search, hit, choke, pepper spray, taser, handcuff, ticket, arrest, and kill POC at higher rates than whites, even though POC often commit no more offenses than whites- Insist police treat POC and whites the same- Realize that, like most whites, police consciously or unconsciously believe that POC are more dangerous and violent- Recognize that when police say they shot an unarmed black man because they feared for their lives, that may be true<ul style="list-style-type: none">o That fear is racist and unfounded- Accept that police brutality is about power and corruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Use the terms black-on-black crime or brown-on-brown crime<ul style="list-style-type: none">o It's racisto We don't talk about white-on-white crime, which are most crimes- Ignore that crime is caused by community conditions, e.g., concentrated poverty and unemployment

Discussion Round 3

1. What do you think about the anti-racism actions for whites from these chapters, such as what was not clear, what did you find most important, etc.?
2. How does your upbringing influence the organization of your classes?
3. How else can we use this information in our university?

CONTENT: CHAPTERS 7, 8, 9 & 10

Chapter 7. How can I talk about affirmative action?

	DO	DON'T
Affirmative action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Determine whether POC have equal opportunity in your organization - Recognize that POC and women are as intelligent, hardworking, and talented as white men and extra effort is needed to overcome unfair barriers - Realize that the arguments against affirmative action don't make sense and are not supported by data - Know that affirmative action is not enough to fight racism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assume that a person of color gets hired or promoted because of their race
As an employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make sure POC and women are a substantial proportion of those interviewed and hired - Ensure that POC and women receive the same pay as white males for the same work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Think affirmative action is reverse racism
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that students of color are not expelled or suspended at higher rates than white students - Require that teachers call parents of children of color: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o At no higher rates than they call parents of white children about problem behavior o At the same rates as they call parents of white children about good behavior - Offer healthy food to low-income children because they are often hungry 	

Chapter 8. What is the school-to-prison pipeline?

	DO	DON'T
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Find out why a student of color is having a bad day rather than using discipline for problem behavior - Make sure students of color are not arrested at higher rates than white students - Reduce racial bias and increase cultural sensitivity of school administrators and teachers - Ensure that zero tolerance policies relate only to real weapons - Recognize everyday achievements of all students of color, not just those of a few “exceptional children” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Over assign students of color to special education - Use school resource officers (police) to handle discipline - Call black and brown kids “thugs,” “hoodlums,” or “gangbangers”

Chapter 9. Why can't I say the “n” word?

	DO	DON'T
The “n” word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Realize that the “n” word was historically used by whites to demean and express hatred toward blacks - Be aware that the “n” word hurts black people because it still invokes feelings of trauma and oppression related to the racist past, such as lynchings, blacks only lunch counters, and police dogs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Say that blacks should just get over it (racism is still happening) - Think it is unfair that blacks can use the word and whites cannot: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What is unfair is that whites benefit from racism

Chapter 10. What is cultural appropriation?

Definition	<p>Cultural appropriation is the adoption or exploitation of another culture by a more dominant culture It is a problem when it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Distorts the culture being exploited ▪ Does not benefit that culture ▪ Does not address the ongoing racism towards that culture 	
	DO	DON'T
Cultural appropriation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Realize that rap music is a respectable art form - Appreciate and respect the culture of POC - Listen to POC when they say that some cultural appropriation offends them - Know that it is unfair to exploit a culture while not addressing the racism faced by the culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be insensitive to struggles expressed in the art of other cultures

Discussion Round 4

1. What do you think about the anti-racism actions for whites from these chapters, such as what was not clear, what did you find most important, etc.?
2. Do you feel you cannot talk about race because you either are or are *not* an instructor of color?
3. How else can we use this information in our university?

CONTENT: CHAPTERS 11, 12, 13 & 14

Chapter 11. Why can't I touch your hair?

	DO	DON'T
Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Realize that hair touching is a serious microaggression for many black women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask black women if they have seen the Chris rock film on hair or give a synopsis of the film - Belittle black women for spending money and putting chemicals on their hair - Touch anybody anywhere without their permission

Chapter 12. What are microaggressions?

Definition	<p>Small daily insults and indignities against POC. They can be words or actions signaling that POC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Don't belong ▪ Are less than and not worthy of as much respect as white people ▪ See list of statements/actions on pages 170-171 	
	DO	DON'T
Racial micro-aggressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Realize that microaggressions are a big deal because of their emotional and physical effects on POC, their cumulative effects, and their normalization of racism by making racism part of everyday life - Speak out if you experience or witness a microaggression, such as by asking "Why did you say that?" or saying "I don't get it, please clarify" - Apologize if you commit a microaggression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - View POC as angry if they speak out against it

Chapter 13. Why are our students so angry?

	DO	DON'T
Small acts of resistance	- Understand that POC may be angry with America because of the racism	- Force or expect students or adults to say the pledge of allegiance or sing the national anthem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They may not believe in countries that promote war ○ They may not believe in a Christian god ○ They may not agree that America is a place of liberty and justice for all

Chapter 14. What is the model minority myth?

Definition	It is a racist myth. It harms people by hiding and ignoring many disadvantages faced by Asian Americans, such as college and career steering and “bamboo ceilings.” For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educators may assume Asian Americans need less support ▪ Colleges may adopt lower acceptance rates for Asian Americans 	
	DO	DON'T
Model minority myth	- Know that there are large economic and education differences among Asian Americans and other groups - Fight the model minority myth	- Ignore hate crimes against Asian Americans - Ignore domestic abuse by Asian Americans - Ignore everyday racism and microaggressions against Asian Americans

Discussion Round 5

1. What do you think about the anti-racism actions for whites from these chapters, such as what was not clear, what did you find most important, etc.?
2. Has laying ground rules for civil interaction in your syllabi diminished microaggressions?
3. How else can we use this information in our university?

CONTENT: CHAPTERS 15, 16 & 17

Chapter 15. But what if I hate Al Sharpton?

	DO	DON'T
Being an ally	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Support POC who fight for justice and equality, even if they are angry and demanding- Recognize that the problem is not how POC discuss race, but the racism itself- Avoid being the tone police; what matters is the injustice being discussed, not how it is discussed and making white people feel comfortable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Tell POC who fight racism that they are the reason for poor race relations- Tell POC to stop talking about race

Chapter 16. I just got called racist, what do I do now?

	DO	DON'T
Being called a racist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Know that racism exists even if you have not seen it- Talk about racism, even if many white people can't handle it- Acknowledge that, due to living in a white supremacist country, all white Americans are racist- Apologize if you have caused harm through your racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Fear being called a racist- Try to destroy and retaliate against people who point out racism

Chapter 17. Talking is great, but what else can I do?

- Vote local and for diversity in elected officials
- Get in schools
- Bear witness to mistreatment
- Speak up in unions
- Support POC-owned businesses
- Boycott businesses that exploit POC
- Give money to organizations that fight racial oppression
- Increase the minimum wage
- Push for police reform
- Demand college diversity

Discussion Round 6

1. What do you think about the anti-racism actions for whites from these chapters, such as what was not clear, what did you find most important, etc.?
2. What concrete anti-racist action can you implement in your classroom?
3. What other anti-racism actions would you like to start taking?
4. How else can we use this information in our university?
5. What resources besides Oluo's book and video do you suggest using?

Ralph Bangs' final thoughts

- Racism by white people towards POC is a huge problem in America. We need good education, information, and conversations for white people to recognize and understand the problem.
- Racism is a big problem in universities too. We could give many recent examples of white faculty ignoring race in their classes, committing microaggressions, and using the “n” word. We can give many recent examples of white students avoiding conversations about race, claiming colorblindness, and opposing instructors of color.
- If we agree that racism is wrong, then we should stop our own racist actions, speak up to tell others that it is not OK to make racist statements or take discriminatory actions, and work to dismantle institutional and structural systems of racism.
- Oluo’s book and the video overview to her book are a good place to start to help whites understand and discuss race better, talk to POC, and become active anti-racists. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO BE ANTI-RACIST. WE NEED TO WORK HARD TO STOP RACISM.

What are your final thoughts?