

Section 1 (Large Group)

“The chilling reality is that while the American dream fell into the laps of millions of Americans, making the GI Bill the great equalizer for the range of white ethnicities in the melting pot, Americans of color, including one million black GIs who’d risked their lives in the war, were largely excluded.” (p. 33)

“A set of policies created by the FHA, and implemented by lenders and realtors, mapped out neighborhoods according to the skin color of residents. This national housing appraisal system, commonly known as “redlining,” deemed skin color as much a valuation indicator as a building’s condition. Neighborhoods inhabited by blacks or other people of color were outlined in red, the color in the legend next to the word, “Hazardous” (investment).” (p.33-34)

1. Does Irving’s description of a predominantly white neighborhood mirror anyone else’s experience? (show of hands)
2. Did any of your fathers benefit from the GI Bill? (show of hands)

To think about (but not answer out loud):

3. Can you imagine how black veterans and their families felt?
4. How did not being able to own a home and grow equity impact their lives?
5. What happened in the neighborhoods in which black veterans were able to purchase homes?

“Not so long ago, if someone had called me a racist, I would have kicked and screamed in protest. “But I’m a good person!” I would have insisted. “I don’t see color! I don’t have a racist bone in my body!” I would have felt insulted and misunderstood and stomped off to lick my wounds. That’s because I thought being a racist meant not liking people of color or being a name-calling bigot.” (p. xi)

“As I unpack my own white experience in the pages ahead, I have no pretense that I speak for all white Americans, not even my four white siblings. Never before have I been so keenly aware of how individual our cultural experiences and perspectives are. That said, all Americans live within the context of one dominant culture, the one brought to this country by white Anglo settlers. Exploring one’s relationship to that culture is where the waking-up process begins.” (p.xii)

Section 2 (Small Groups)

“Genetically speaking, humans have the least intra-species genetic variation, and the greatest variation occurs within ethnic groups.” (p.39)

"No science supports the idea that genetic makeup follows the neat racial lines white people have created. No science links race to intrinsic traits such as intelligence or musical or physical abilities." (p.39)

"The biggest problem with America's idea of racial categories is that they are not just categories: they've been used to imply a hierarchy born of nature. Regardless of how racial categories came into being, Americans have been cast in racial roles that have the power to become self-fulfilling, self-perpetuation prophecies." (p.41)

1. When did you first notice you were a different race or color than someone else?
2. What stereotypes about people of another race do you remember hearing and believing as a child?
3. Were you ever encouraged to question stereotypes?

Section 3 (Small Groups)

"I never questioned whether I belonged in America and its institutions. ... I grew up believing the police were there to protect me.... I've now learned that just five miles away black mothers in Boston were teaching their children not to play hide-and-seek outside lest it appear they were sneaking around and up to no good. 'If you get stopped by the police,' black mothers routinely tell their kids, 'keep your hands in plain sight so they don't think you have a gun.'" (p.137)

1. Contrast what black and white parents tell their children about the police.
2. When you are pulled over by an officer of the law, what is your greatest fear? What do you think the greatest fear is of people of color who are stopped by an officer of the law?

Section 4 (Small Groups)

"Still trapped in my white-dominated belief system, I didn't know what I didn't know. Topping the list was the unknown truth about just how much humility would be required to become an effective agent of change." (p.126)

"I was years from learning just how weary people of color are of being in the position of having to educate white people (about racism)." (p.128)

"How can racism possibly be dismantled until white people, lots and lots of white people, understand it as unfair system, get in touch with the subtle stories and stereotypes that play in their heads, and see themselves not as good or bad but as players in the system? Until white people embrace the problem, the elephant in the room-and all the nasty tension and mistrust that goes with it-will endure. And the feedback efforts of people of color will fall on ignorant ears at best, or be misconstrued as too whiney or too angry at worst." (p.153)

“Self-examination and the courage to admit to bias and unhelpful inherited behaviors may be our greatest tools for change. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable enough to expose our ignorance and insecurities takes courage. And love. I believe the most loving thing a person, or a group of people, can do for another is to examine the ways in which their own insecurities and assumptions interfere with other’s ability to thrive. Please join me in opening your heart and mind to the possibility that you- yes, even well-intentioned you- have room to change and grow, so that you can work with people of all colors and ethnicities to co-create communities that unite, strengthen and prosper.” (p. 249)

1. How often do you talk about race with your family and friends?
2. Why do you think that is the case?
3. What can you do to change?

Section 5 (Large Group)

“No one alive today created this mess, but everyone alive today has the power to work on undoing it. ... Racism is taught, and racism is learned. Understanding how and why our beliefs developed along racial lines holds the promise of healing, liberation, and the unleashing of America’s vast human potential.” (p. xiii)

1. Is the church immune from institutional racism? Why or why not?
2. What do you hear God calling you to change or to do through this book discussion?
3. What concrete steps can we take to challenge and dismantle systemic racism?