



# Belonging Community Conversation on Race

Host Guide

Imagine Fox Cities Initiative



Dear Change Maker,

Thank you for considering hosting one of the Belonging Community Conversations on Race. First things first, please read the short set of materials provided carefully before beginning your conversation. The goals of these conversations are to listen and share personal stories without judgement in order to create a foundation upon which to take action together to eliminate racism.

The expressed American ideal is the creation of a society that is fair and has opportunity for all, regardless of individual or group identity. We see examples everyday of how we fall short of this ideal. We hope these conversations will help us understand why we are unable to reach our admirable but elusive goal. By enhancing our understanding of the issues related to racial injustice, we can plan a better way forward together that will improve the wellbeing of all of us in the Fox Cities, and create a community in which we know that we belong.

Thank you for taking this important step toward changing our community for the better. In order to ensure that we keep improving this work and that your efforts have the biggest impact, please complete the short five-item survey after your conversation by following the link at the end of the facilitators/host guide.

With gratitude,

Imagine Fox Cities Belonging Group

## **Facilitator's Instructions**

This Imagine Fox Cities Belonging Conversation offers a simple, sociable and structured way to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships. Typically, 4-7 people meet by video call or in person for about 90 minutes to listen to and be heard by others. Rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share and learn. No preparation is required, though background links are available for participants to gain more information on the topic. Anyone can host using these italicized instructions. Hosts also participate. Some hosts may offer a Q & A after Closing. This uses the Living Room Conversations format

### **Introductions:**

Why We're Here (~10 min)

*Each participant has 1 minute to introduce themselves.*

Share your name, where you live, what drew you here, and if this is your first conversation.

### **Conversation Agreements:**

How We'll Engage (~5 min)

These will set the tone of our conversation; participants may volunteer to take turns reading them aloud. (A more detailed explanation of each is attached.)

*Be curious and listen to understand.*

*Show respect and suspend judgment.*

*Note any common ground as well as any differences.*

*Be authentic and welcome that from others.*

*Be purposeful and to the point.*

*Own and guide the conversation.*



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**Question Rounds:**

What We'll Talk About

*Optional: a participant can keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.*

Round 1:

Getting to Know Each Other (~10 min)

*Each participant can take 1-2 minutes to answer the following question:*

What are your hopes and dreams for your family, community and/or the country?

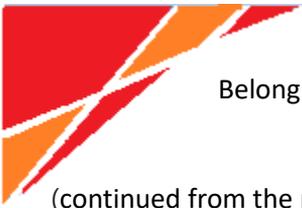
Round 2:

Round Two: Race (~40 min)

*One participant can volunteer to read the definition of race.*

Race is a social construct not a biological category. The idea began to crystalize into its modern meaning in the early 17th Century in the Americas when people from around the world came to live together in large numbers for the first time. It was a way to justify a certain economic system and power structure. The concept rationalized treating enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples differently than folks from Europe.

Ironically, this way of thinking about different groups of people was used to justify the mistreatment of slaves and Indigenous tribal nations at a time when people around the world were demanding freedom, justice and equality. Prior to this point humans identified



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(continued from the previous page)

themselves by ethnic group. However, this began the process of homogenizing ethnic groups from Europe into what we consider white and all those from other places as nonwhite or people of color. It created a hierarchy of human value based on skin color and physical features that still influences our thinking and behavior today, although science has made it clear there is no biological marker for race. So we create race every day, by doing race.

*Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring additional questions as time allows.*

- a. What is an early memory of race? Or when did you first learn there was something called race? Was that memory of race a positive or negative experience for you?
- b. How do you determine someone's race?
- c. Do you feel your race impacts your daily life? If so, how?
- d. Were conversations about race a part of your upbringing? If so, how was the subject approached?
- e. How do the people around you talk about other races?

### Round 3:

Reflecting on the Conversation (~15 min)

In one sentence, share what was most meaningful or valuable to you in the experience of this conversation?



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*Take 2 minutes to answer **one** of the following questions:*

- a. What new understanding or common ground did you find within this topic?
- b. Has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?
- c. Name one important thing that was accomplished here.
- d. Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

**Closing (~5 min) Provide feedback!**

**<https://tinyurl.com/RaceConversationFeedback>**



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### Conversation Agreements

#### **Be curious and listen to understand.**

Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.

#### **Show respect and suspend judgment.**

People tend to judge one another. Setting judgement aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try truly listening, without interruption or crosstalk.

#### **Note any common ground as well as any differences.**

Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.

#### **Be authentic and welcome that from others.**

Share what is important to you. Speak from your experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.

#### **Be purposeful and to the point.**

Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.

#### **Own and guide the conversation.**

Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreements are not being honored.

## **Understanding the Idea of Race**

Race is a social construct not a biological category. The idea began to crystalize into its modern meaning in the early 17th Century in the Americas when people from around the world came to live together in large numbers for the first time. It was a way to justify a certain economic system and power structure. The concept rationalized treating enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples differently than folks from Europe.

Ironically, this way of thinking about different groups of people was used to justify the mistreatment of slaves and Indigenous tribal nations at a time when people around the world were demanding freedom, justice and equality. Prior to this point humans identified themselves by ethnic group. However, this began the process of homogenizing ethnic groups from Europe into what we consider white and all those from other places as nonwhite or people of color. It created a hierarchy of human value based on skin color and physical features that still influences our thinking and behavior today, although science has made it clear there is no biological marker for race. So we create race every day, by doing race.

### **Race as Doing**

#### **Race is:**

- a dynamic system of historically-derived and institutionalized ideas and practices;
- not a thing that people have or are, but rather actions that people do;
- a system of social distinction that creates, responds to, and reinforces human difference; and
- not the work of individuals alone, but a product of society.



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### **Race can:**

- sort people into groups according to perceived physical and behavioral human characteristics that are often imagined to be negative, innate, and shared;
- associate differential value, power, and privilege with these characteristics, establish a hierarchy among the different groups, and confer opportunity accordingly;
- emerge when groups are perceived to pose a threat (political, economic, or cultural) to each other's world view or way of life; and/or
- justify the denigration and exploitation (past, current, or future) of other groups while exalting one's own group to claim an innate privilege.

### **Race can also:**

- allow people to identify with groupings of people on the basis of presumed, and usually claimed, commonalities including several of the following: language, history, nation or region of origin, customs, religion, names, physical appearance, and/or ancestry group;
- when claimed, confer a sense of belonging, pride, and motivation; and/or
- be a source of collective and individual identity.

(from "Doing Race: An Introduction," *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*, Moya & Markus, 2010)



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"What the study of complete genomes from different parts of the world has shown is that even between Africa and Europe, for example, there is not a single absolute genetic difference, meaning no single variant where all Africans have one variant and all Europeans another one, even when recent migration is disregarded," Pääbo told Live Science. (Read the entire article at the link below.)

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/race-is-a-social-construct-scientists-argue/>

Additional resources about race:

<http://sparqtools.org/raceworks-videos/>

[https://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_General/000\\_00-Home.htm](https://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)

<https://www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/> (Episode 2 is especially recommended.)