

# Together *and* Alone? The Challenge of Talking about Racism on Campus

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*Higher education institutions are among the few places where people of different racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds can engage with each other in more than just a superficial way, providing students a unique opportunity to develop the skills needed to function effectively in a diverse, increasingly global world. Whether students develop this capacity will depend in large part on whether the institution they attend has provided structures for those critical learning experiences to take place. But what form should such learning experiences take? This essay argues that positive cross-racial engagement may require both structured intergroup dialogue and intragroup dialogue opportunities to support the learning needs of both White students and students of color in the context of predominantly White institutions.*

In 1954, the year of the landmark Supreme Court case on school segregation *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. population was 90 percent White.<sup>1</sup> Today, the majority of elementary and secondary school children are children of color: Black, Latinx, Asian, or American Indian.<sup>2</sup> Yet despite the changing demographics of the nation, most children in the United States attend elementary and secondary schools that do not reflect that diversity. Old patterns of segregation persist, most notably in schools and neighborhoods. More than sixty years after *Brown*, our public schools are more segregated today than they were in 1980.<sup>3</sup> Nationwide, nearly 75 percent of Black students today attend so-called majority-minority schools, and 38 percent attend schools with student bodies that are 10 percent or less White. Similarly, approximately 80 percent of Latinx youth attend schools where students of color are in the majority, and more than 40 percent attend schools where the White population is less than 10 percent of the student body. Both Black and Latinx students are much more likely than White students to attend a school where 60 percent or more of their classmates are living in poverty.<sup>4</sup>

Neighborhoods once again determine public school assignment, and to the extent that neighborhoods are segregated, the schools remain so.

Given this pattern of segregation, it is perhaps no surprise that, according to a 2013 American Values Survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), 75 percent of Whites have entirely White social networks, without any minority presence. This degree of social network racial isolation is significantly higher than among Black Americans (65 percent) or Hispanic Americans (46 percent). Robert P. Jones, the CEO of PRRI, has pointed out that “the chief obstacle to having an intelligent, or even intelligible, conversation across the racial divide is that on average White Americans . . . talk mostly to other White people.” The result is that most Whites are not “socially positioned” to understand the experiences of people of color.<sup>5</sup> The now centuries-long persistence of residential and school segregation in the United States goes a long way toward explaining such social network homogeneity.

And what difference does it make? In his 1968 book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King observes that the social change needed for a healthy multiracial society would not occur without meaningful cross-group contact. “A vigorous enforcement of civil rights will bring an end to segregated public facilities, but it cannot bring an end to fears, prejudice, pride and irrationality, which are the barriers to a truly integrated society.” King continues, “Racial understanding is not something that we find but something that we must create. . . . The ability of [racial groups] to work together, to understand each other will not be found ready-made; it must be created by the fact of contact.” *Empathic* contact must be created. It is not enough to be in the same neighborhood, or even in the same room. It is necessary to create contact that allows for genuine empathy across lines of difference if we are to reduce the barriers that King describes.

Higher education offers us the possibility of creating such empathic contact. More young people than ever are making the choice to pursue higher education. The increasing diversity of our nation can be seen in higher ed institutions of all kinds. The incoming class of 2022 is more diverse than ever, reflecting the changing demographics of the nation. Even a highly selective institution like Harvard University reported in the fall of 2017 that the entering class was the most diverse in its history, with students of color for the first time making up more than 50 percent of the cohort.<sup>6</sup> Colleges and universities are among the few places where people of different racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds can engage with each other in more than just a superficial way. For many students, regardless of racial background, the college environment is likely the most diverse learning environment they have experienced in their lives. In that context, students have a unique opportunity to

engage with people whose life experiences and viewpoints are different than their own *and* to develop the leadership capacity needed to function effectively in a diverse, increasingly global world. Learning to engage with others whose viewpoints are different from one's own is a citizenship skill fundamental to maintaining a healthy democracy.

Whether college students develop this citizenship skill, however, will depend in large part on whether the institution they attend has provided structure for those critical learning experiences to take place. It is natural for students of all backgrounds to gravitate to the comfort of the familiar, seeking out those places where they experience a deep sense of belonging. Sometimes that sense of belonging comes from spending time with same-experience peers (such as those who may be of the same racial background, or share the same religious beliefs, or speak the same home-language), and there is nothing wrong with that. But the development of these citizenship skills requires stepping out of one's comfort zone and engaging with difference. Without encouragement, students often avoid doing so.

For example, in the fall of 2016, I visited Franklin and Marshall College, a small liberal arts college in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, that is increasingly known for its commitment to expanding access for student talent from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The president had invited me to join him in a conversation about the importance of dialogue as the kick-off event for "A Day of Dialogue" on campus. After the college had spent the previous school year "participating in a national conversation about inclusiveness and discrimination, about identity and community, about who we are and who we hope to become," the faculty suggested that classes be canceled for a day to allow time for the community to "center ourselves . . . and listen to one another, where we set a goal to be able to go forward as a community in diversity – not have *one* day of dialogue but *catalyze* deeper inquiry together as a part of who we are, our very core."<sup>7</sup>

The schedule for the day was full, and students were engaged in facilitated conversations on various topics. Every session room I saw was full, and students were listening to each other intently. At lunchtime, students were randomly assigned to eat lunch together in student spaces that they might not otherwise enter. I joined a group of students having lunch in one of the fraternity houses. Many of the students had never been in it before, and the young White man who served as one of the hosts acknowledged that he, too, had avoided spaces on campus that felt unfamiliar to him. For example, he had never entered the Black Cultural Center, though he had been invited to programs there, or attended a Hillel event, though he had several Jewish friends, or made the time to attend the weekly International Student

Coffee Hour. Student enthusiasm for the opportunity to enter unfamiliar territory and make new connections that day seemed genuine. The unanswered question was whether they could build on the day's momentum for *sustained* engagement.

**H**ow might such meaningful engagement be created? I would argue that positive cross-group engagement can be achieved through the power of structured dialogue. Institutions that are intentional in stimulating such intellectual growth by providing formative experiences of dialogue across lines of difference (ideological as well as sociological) can help students develop the skills they need to be effective citizens in an increasingly complex world and, perhaps, help each other find common ground.

The University of Michigan has pioneered this strategy for sustained engagement through a residential learning community known as the Michigan Community Scholars Program (MCSP). Established in 1999, the MCSP has an inspiring mission statement:

The Michigan Community Scholars Program is a residential learning community emphasizing deep learning, engaged community, meaningful civic engagement/community service learning, and intercultural understanding and dialogue. Students, faculty, community partners, and staff think critically about issues of community, seek to model a just, diverse, and democratic community, and wish to make a difference throughout their lives as participants and leaders involved in local, national, and global communities.<sup>8</sup>

The learning community is made up of 120 first-year students and their resident advisers, as well as ten to fifteen faculty members linked to the program. An intentionally diverse community, the MCSP interrupts the experience of segregated residential communities from which the students typically come. The MCSP uniquely brings together service-learning, diversity, and dialogue in a powerful way. Unlike the typical residence hall experience in which students from different backgrounds might pass each other in the hallway without really engaging one another, at the core of the MCSP experience is the opportunity, indeed the requirement, for intergroup dialogue. As part of the residential experience, the students take a seminar together and participate in various structured dialogues in the residence hall.

While visiting the University of Michigan in the fall of 2016, just a month before the U.S. presidential election, I facilitated a focus group of MCSP students and heard all speak eloquently about how much they had gained from the program. They also shared how different their experiences were from their classmates' who were not participating in such a program. In the midst

of a campaign season characterized by rancorous debate and divisive rhetoric, these students were deeply engaged with each other, across lines of difference, and were learning how to talk *with* one another about hard topics rather than talking *past* one another or avoiding interaction altogether.

The value of these cross-group connections was made more salient by racist acts that took place on campus during that semester. White supremacist posters with explicitly anti-Black content were posted around the Michigan campus, creating a hostile environment for Black students who felt under attack. One young African-American woman, still in her first year, explained, “It’s hard to focus [on your schoolwork] when there’s so much hateful stuff. . . . It’s hard to know who to trust. . . . It takes energy to reach out to Whites without knowing if they are ‘safe.’ MCSP helps with that.” A White woman in her cohort was quick to second that sentiment, even though as a White student she was not the target of hateful rhetoric. She added, “MCSP is the only place where I’ve constantly felt supported, listened to, and understood.”

In a qualitative study of the impact of the MCSP on students’ growth relative to social justice outcomes, Rebecca Christensen, Michigan’s director of engaged learning, found that nineteen out of twenty-two participants exhibited greater cognitive, affective, and behavioral empathy toward others, and were actively engaged in educating others and “speaking out” against injustice. They had heightened motivation to “create small-scale change in their everyday lives” and to “incorporate social justice into their future careers.” Of the various curricular, cocurricular, and informal MCSP-affiliated activities that facilitated their growth, students identified the dialogues both in and outside of the classroom as the most influential.<sup>9</sup>

Though only a small number of students (relative to the thousands who attend the University of Michigan) have the opportunity to participate in the residential MCSP, it serves as an excellent model that could be expanded at Michigan and certainly replicated on other campuses. Alternatively, Michigan students also have the option to register for one of the dialogue courses offered by the Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR). The first program of its kind in the nation, founded in 1988, the IGR precedes the MCSP by a decade. Described as a social justice education program, the IGR blends theory and experiential learning to facilitate students’ learning about social group identity, social inequality, and intergroup relations. It is intentional in its effort to prepare students to live and work in a diverse world and educate them in making choices that advance equity, justice, and peace.<sup>10</sup>

What exactly are the dialogues? Defined by Ximena Zúñiga, one of the original architects of the Michigan IGR program, and her colleagues, an intergroup dialogue is a facilitated, face-to-face encounter that seeks to foster

meaningful engagement between members of two or more social identity groups that have a history of conflict (for example, Whites and people of color or Arabs and Jews).<sup>11</sup> The identity groups (defined by race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, or national origin) are balanced in size, with five to seven participants from each group, and carefully designed to address issues of social group identity, conflict, community, and social justice. Emphasizing both process and content, the credit-bearing courses use a four-stage model that provides a developmental sequence for the dialogue: 1) creating a shared meaning of dialogue; 2) identity, social relations, and conflict; 3) issues of social justice; and 4) alliances and empowerment. At the heart of the methodology is cultivating the capacity to listen, a skill that is central to the practice of dialogue.

Does dialogue lead to social action? The research evidence suggests the answer is yes! Both White students and students of color who participate in dialogue demonstrate attitudinal and behavioral changes, including: increased self-awareness about issues of power and privilege, greater awareness of the institutionalization of race and racism in the United States, better cross-racial interactions, less fear of race-related conflict, and greater participation in social change actions during and after college.<sup>12</sup> A multiuniversity study of intergroup dialogue programs found that participants increase their capacity for intergroup empathy and their motivation to connect with people different from themselves. This is especially significant since longitudinal research shows that these changes endure beyond the time of participation in the dialogues.<sup>13</sup>

Increasingly recognized as a high-impact educational practice, dialogue programs are spreading to other campuses. Zúñiga now teaches at the University of Massachusetts in the social justice education program, where she is training graduate students who want to become expert in dialogue facilitation and related research. As at Michigan, UMass offers intergroup dialogue courses. I had the opportunity to sit in on two group dialogue sessions in November 2016, just ten days after the presidential election. It was powerful to hear students talking about how they had been able to use their dialogic skills outside of class to have difficult conversations with peers about the election at a time when so many of their elders were struggling to have such conversations themselves.

The ripple effects of the Michigan and UMass models can be seen at Skidmore College, where sociologist Kristie Ford is now the director of the Skidmore intergroup relations program, which has adapted the Michigan model to suit Skidmore's small campus. In 2012, Skidmore became the first college or university in the United States to offer a minor in intergroup relations.

(Even though it is the leader in intergroup dialogue, the University of Michigan did not establish its intergroup relations minor until 2015.) Unlike UMass or the University of Michigan, Skidmore is a liberal arts college and does not have a ready supply of graduate students to serve as dialogue facilitators. Instead, Skidmore focuses on developing peer facilitators to lead the dialogue groups. Facilitators are selected based on their academic performance, developmental maturity, leadership potential, and demonstrated facilitation ability. They take at least three courses over a three-semester period as preparation, and they are provided ongoing support and supervision from a faculty member during their peer-facilitation experience. In her book *Facilitating Change through Intergroup Dialogue: Social Justice Advocacy in Practice*, Ford documents the postgraduate effects on those undergraduates who learned to be facilitators. Their commitment to social justice is evidenced in their career choices and their continued growth as White allies and as empowered people of color.<sup>14</sup>

The IGR model has recently been adapted for use in high schools. In one study, trained college students, serving as near-peer facilitators, led eight weekly dialogues with students in a racially diverse high school, designed to engage the younger students in exploring identity, building cross-group relationships, and learning how to intervene in intergroup conflict. As with the college examples, the dialogues with younger adolescents were impactful. Students “deepened their ability to think critically about racial issues and listen actively to others’ opinions,” proving the dialogues to be “an effective intervention model for promoting civil discourse on race in this hyperpartisan age.”<sup>15</sup>

While it is clear that intergroup dialogue can be an effective tool for building bridges and perhaps reducing what Dr. King referred to as the “fears, prejudice, pride and irrationality, which are the barriers to a truly integrated society,” there are those who are understandably hesitant to participate. Among them are students of color who fear that the dialogue process will place the heavy burden of educating their White peers on their shoulders. In his essay on the challenges of being a Black professor whose scholarship is on race, George Yancy writes not only of his experience with racism in the academy, but also about the frustration students of color express about the futility of talking to White people about racism.

Some of my students of color have asked me, “Why talk about race with white people when at the end of the day everything remains the same – that is, their racism continues?” “Why teach courses on race and whiteness?” “Do you really think that such courses will make a difference?”<sup>16</sup>

I hear similar questions from students of color on the predominantly White campuses I regularly visit. They wonder if it is worth the emotional energy required to try to explain what it is like to be the target of someone's malice or the object of someone's indifference. Is it their obligation, they ask, to educate fellow students about history that should have already been learned, or experiences with racism that are painful to recall and exhausting to explain? Some people of color have concluded it is not worth the emotional cost.

Though journalist Reni Eddo-Lodge lives in Great Britain, her 2014 blog post on why she does not want to engage with most White people in conversations about race has resonated with many people of color in the United States. She expanded on her post in a longer article for *The Guardian*:

On 22 February 2014, I published a post on my blog. I titled it "Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race." It read: "I'm no longer engaging with white people on the topic of race. Not all white people, just the vast majority who refuse to accept the existence of structural racism and its symptoms. I can no longer engage with the gulf of an emotional disconnect that white people display when a person of colour articulates their experience. You can see their eyes shut down and harden. It's like treacle is poured into their ears, blocking up their ear canals. It's like they can no longer hear us."<sup>17</sup>

The frustration of feeling unheard again and again can be a significant source of stress for an already vulnerable population. According to a national survey conducted in 2018, students of color report higher rates of emotional distress in their freshman year than White students and are more likely to keep their difficulties to themselves. They are half as likely as their White peers to seek out counseling, yet they need support.<sup>18</sup> That support is often found through affinity groups and in designated cultural spaces on campus.

Some faculty and administrators question the value of such spaces, sometimes referred to as "safe spaces." Such places might be more accurately described as "refueling spaces," where students feeling depleted from the ongoing effort to navigate unfamiliar or hostile social environments can relax and recharge their energy with other students who share and therefore understand their experiences. Alumni of color often acknowledge the importance of this kind of emotional support for their success in an otherwise alienating environment. In a recent conversation with a Native woman who graduated from a highly selective university, she acknowledged that she "never would have made it through without the Native American Cultural Center," where she spent much of her free time. In an essay about her undergraduate experience at the University of Missouri from 1997 to 2001, historian Marcia Chatelain describes the racial harassment she and other student activists were



subjected to in the form of threatening letters, strange phone calls, and frightening emails, delivering messages about “who needed to shut up and die.”

Conjuring up those memories makes my stomach churn. . . . Pranks or promises? You never knew. . . . You sink into a hypervigilance that some read as paranoia. But the humiliation and fear become a part of you. Every cell of your 19-year old body holds the anxiety of the moments when you are put in your place because you dared to come into someone else’s home and thought you could make it yours too. . . . When critics mock students for wanting safe spaces, they often argue that political correctness is undermining education and that students today are “too sensitive.” Rarely do I ever hear any curiosity about what students are seeking shelter from; when my friends and I peered around the corners of our sprawling campus, dissenting opinions were the least of our worries.<sup>19</sup>

Twenty years later, with hate crimes on the rise since the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump, the fear she describes is part of another generation’s college experience.<sup>20</sup> The Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks hate-motivated incidents, reports that schools, both K–12 and higher ed institutions, have been the most common venues for hate incidents.<sup>21</sup> Add to that the “you don’t belong here” message conveyed by frequent social media documentation of White people calling the police to report “suspicious” Black people doing ordinary, quite lawful things like sitting in Starbucks waiting for someone or taking a nap in the common room of one’s own residence hall; or the “stop speaking Spanish” demands directed at Latinx shoppers in a store; or the casual “Where are you REALLY from?” questions asked of Asian-American citizens, too often viewed as “foreigners” in the country of their birth. It is easy to understand why students of color will tell you they are “tired” and why they might want to refuel in the welcoming company of each other.

In her 2018 book *Race on Campus: Debunking Myths with Data*, higher ed scholar Julie Park summarizes research demonstrating that the involvement of students of color, particularly Black and Latinx students, with ethnic student organizations is linked with a deeper sense of campus belonging and greater cross-racial campus engagement.

Ethnic student organizations play a vital role in not just helping retain students of color: they also contribute to the broader campus racial climate by promoting interracial interaction, giving students of color space to recharge their batteries and navigate a diverse and at times racially charged environment.<sup>22</sup>

Though it may seem counterintuitive that affinity group opportunities would promote higher rates of overall interracial contact, if we understand that people are more willing to take risks when they are operating from an

internal sense of strength, it makes sense that the experience of affirmation and belonging found in affinity groups could serve as a launching pad for greater cross-campus engagement and eventual participation in the challenging work of intergroup dialogue.

As noted earlier, White adults represent the demographic group with the lowest rates of casual interracial contact and interracial friendship. The same is true of young White students.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, Whites have their own anxieties about engaging in intergroup dialogue. During my years of teaching a course on the psychology of racism at predominantly White institutions, my White students often expressed fear that because of their limited knowledge and experience interacting with people of color, they might ask a naive question or make an offensive remark. This student's comment was typical: "The fear of speaking is overwhelming. I do not feel, for me, that it is fear of rejection from people of my race, but anger and disdain from people of color." Another acknowledged, "Fear requires us to be honest with not only others, but with ourselves. Often this much honesty is difficult for many of us, for it would permit our insecurities and ignorance to surface. . . . Rather than publicly admit our weaknesses, we remain silent."<sup>24</sup>

The retreat into silence is just one of several strategies commonly used by White students when they experience discomfort in conversations about race. Multicultural education scholar Robin DiAngelo has coined the term "white fragility" to describe the emotional response to such discomfort: "A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation."<sup>25</sup>

Framing White fragility as a lack of stamina in the face of racial discomfort, DiAngelo explains that it results in part from racial isolation and the deeply ingrained expectation of racial comfort that comes from the daily experience of "racial belonging" that White people typically share in a White-dominated society. She writes, "In virtually every situation or context deemed normal, neutral or prestigious in society, [White people] belong racially. This belonging is a deep and ever-present feeling. . . . It is rare to experience a sense of not belonging racially, and these are usually very temporary, easily avoidable situations." DiAngelo further enumerates a common set of racial patterns that are "the foundation of white fragility," including: a demonstrated preference for racial segregation, a lack of understanding about the systemic nature of racism (focusing instead on acts of mean-spirited individuals), seeing themselves as individuals who are "exempt from the forces of racial socialization," a reluctance to acknowledge the significance of history, an inclination

to make assumptions about the universality of their experience, an unwillingness to listen closely to the racial experiences of others, a tendency to dismiss what is not understood, a desire to jump over the hard, personal work of self-examination and get to “solutions,” a need to maintain solidarity with other Whites (such as by not confronting them when they say or do something racially offensive), feeling paralyzed by guilt, taking a defensive stance toward any suggestions that they are connected to racism, and maintaining a focus on intentions rather than impact.<sup>26</sup> White fragility serves to maintain a sense of equilibrium in the face of racial discomfort.

White equilibrium is a cocoon of racial comfort, centrality, superiority, entitlement, racial apathy, and obliviousness, all rooted in an identity of being good people free of racism. Challenging this cocoon throws off our racial balance. Because being racially off balance is so rare, we have not had to build the capacity to sustain the discomfort. Thus, whites find these challenges unbearable and want them to stop.<sup>27</sup>

Such framing helps us understand why exposure to stamina-building activities like dialogue can be an appropriate intervention. That said, some pre-work may be needed before White students can be effective dialogue partners. An Asian-American woman in one of my classes explained,

The process of talking about [racism] is not easy. We people of color can't always make it easier for White people to talk about race relations because sometimes they need to break away from that familiar and safe ground of being neutral or silent. . . . I understand that [some are] trying but sometimes they need to take bigger steps and more risks. As an Asian in America, I am always taking risks when I share my experiences of racism, however the dominant culture expects it of me. . . . Even though I am embarrassed and sometimes get too emotional about these issues, I talk about them because I want to be honest about how I feel.<sup>28</sup>

She is ready to break the silence, but too often her White peers are not. They need more practice.

**S**o what are campus leaders to do? I return to the example of the University of Michigan. Not only do they have intergroup dialogues but they have intragroup dialogues: opportunities for students with shared identities to have facilitated conversations among themselves; students of color in dialogue with each other, as well as White students exploring with other White students why talking about racism is so hard for them and how to become better allies to those who do not experience the same kind of racial belonging on campus that they do. In this context, intergroup dialogue is important, but intragroup dialogue has value, too.

It is certain that without understanding the context of intragroup dialogue, some people see such homogeneous offerings as the institutional sanctioning of segregated gatherings (perhaps even a throwback to our Jim Crow history), and consequently respond very negatively to the idea. For example, when the University of Maryland Counseling Center posted signs advertising a group called “White Awake: A group for White students to talk about race,” described as a “safe space for White students to explore their experiences, questions, reactions, and feelings,” the social media response was rapid and largely negative. One student of color posted, “Why do they need to attend therapy sessions on how to be a decent human being in society? Why do they need to have these sessions to learn how to coexist?”<sup>29</sup> A *White National Review* commentator wrote,

It should seem clear to anyone with a brain that the best way to learn about issues related to other races is to interact with people of other races. Creating a forum to discuss such issues that intentionally *excludes* non-white people is doing everyone a disservice. The best way to learn about any kind of experience is to learn from someone who has actually gone through it, and this group will have no opportunities for that.<sup>30</sup>

Implied in this last comment are the assumptions that White students live outside of the structures of racism, and that students of color should be their teachers, exactly the kind of assumptions many students of color find so problematic.

In response to the critiques, the university changed the name of the group to “Anti-Racism and Ally Building Group,” clarifying its intended purpose. A statement issued by the counseling center staff explained: “The aim of this group is to help White students become more culturally competent, so they can better participate in creating a more inclusive environment at the University of Maryland.”<sup>31</sup> Seen through the conceptual lens of White fragility, the counseling center initiative could be understood as an effort to build White students’ stamina for racial dialogue and relieve students of color of some of the burden of educating their White peers.

If we are clear that the purpose of affinity groups for students of color and ally-building groups for White students is in fact to increase or strengthen the capacity of students to engage meaningfully with each other, the wisdom of providing intragroup dialogues as a campus resource is apparent. The long history of segregated communities in our society has left us with a population of students who arrive at our campus with little previous experience of the kind of empathic contact that Martin Luther King described as necessary for meaningful social change. They should leave better prepared than they

arrived. Building that capacity requires a multifaceted approach. In the case of intergroup or intragroup dialogue, it is not an either-or choice, but rather a both-and strategy.

Some people believe that talking about race only makes race relations in our society worse. Silencing the conversation, however, is just another way to maintain the status quo. You cannot solve a problem without talking about it. Learning how to have this dialogue is a necessary part of moving forward as a healthy society. It is of particular importance that White people who want to see social change learn how to have the conversation, not just with people of color, but with their White peers as well. As social justice educator Lee Anne Bell has written, “Refusing to talk about powerful social realities does not make them go away but rather allows racial illiteracy, confusion and misinformation to persist unchallenged.”<sup>32</sup>

Rather than avoiding hard conversations, through dialogue together and sometimes in same-race groups alone, students can help each other see the past more clearly and understand and communicate with others more fully in the present. With some help, they can find ways to work together in coalition for the betterment of our communities tomorrow and for the health of our democracy.

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