

So You Want to Talk About Race

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Chapter 15—But what if I hate Al Sharpton?

"This same Martin/Malcolm dichotomy is applied to all people of color, and especially black people, who fight for racial justice. A few of us are good and worthy of support. Those of us who manage to say 'not all white people' enough, who manage to say please, who never talk of anger, who avoid words like 'justice,' who keep our indictments abstract and never specific—we are the Martins. Those of us who shout, who inconvenience your day, who call out your specific behavior, who say 'black' loudly and proudly—we are the Malcolms."

If you were an adult or teen during the 60's, what do you remember about Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X? Did you ever discuss their message in your household? At work? In church?

"I receive Facebook comments, Twitter DM's, and e-mails telling me that 'people like me' are the reason why race relations are as bad as they are. My insistence on voicing my anger, on using terms like 'White supremacy' and 'racist' to define White supremacy and things that are racist, my insistence on being seen and acknowledged as black—that is the real issue. White people would love to join me in my fight for freedom and justice, but I've made it too unpleasant for them."

The author makes an important point in this section of the book. There are many different approaches to fighting systemic racism, and we might not "agree" with all of them. However, this does not mean they do not have their place in the movement. How can our dismissal of someone's "approach" contribute to furthering their oppression?

"Tone policing is when someone (usually the privileged person) in a conversation or situation about oppression shifts the focus of the conversation from the oppression being discussed to the way it is being discussed. Tone policing prioritizes the comfort of the privileged person in the situation over the oppression of the disadvantaged person. This is something that can happen in a conversation, but can also apply to critiques of entire civil rights organizations and movements."

Do you understand what "tone policing" is? Can you think of a situation where you were guilty of doing this in connection to any civil rights movement?

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

"To many white people, there is absolutely nothing worse than being called a racist, or someone saying that something you did was racist, or somebody calling somebody you identify with racist. Basically, any time the label of racist touches you at all, it's the worst thing to happen to anybody anywhere."

Have you ever been called racist before? How did it make you feel? how did you react? Share your story.

"When I asked a group of people of color what they feared the most when talking about racism, their number one concern was retaliation."

What did you think of Oluo's story about the Canadian who verbally attacked her repeatedly when she said that Canadians were not a racist society? Why do you think this person got so angry?

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

"There are countless memes you can post, tons of outrage you can share, limitless 'thought exercises' you can participate in. But it is easy to get caught up in this talk and think you're doing so much more than just that—talk. While many people are afraid to talk about race, just as many use talk to hide from what they really fear: action."

Looking over Oluo's list of "thing you can do," what next step will you take to move from talk to action? It's important that we be concrete and specific or, naturally, we will end up doing nothing.