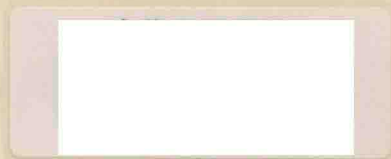




# GETTING **REAL** ABOUT RACE

HOODIES, MASCOTS,  
MODEL MINORITIES,  
AND OTHER CONVERSATIONS



EDITORS

**STEPHANIE M. McCLURE**  
**CHERISE A. HARRIS**

书馆

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**Editors**

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**GETTING  
REAL  
ABOUT RACE**

*To my students, current and former, whose passion and curiosity continually inspire me. And to my coeditor, whose courage and determination continually humble me.*

— Stephanie M. McClure

*To my nephews and all future “Furbies”—may you inherit a world that is a little kinder and understanding toward kids that look like you. To my students over the years who have fought the good fight and decided to do the hard work of understanding and fighting against inequality. And finally, to my coeditor, Steph, whose friendship continues to be generous, patient, and amazing and whose brilliance and passion are nothing short of inspiring.*

— Cherise A. Harris



# Preface

**P**rofessors teaching introductory courses in race and ethnicity or “diversity” must not only communicate the long and complicated history, psychology, and sociology of these topics in just one semester but must also repeatedly respond to the myths and misperceptions of race that students bring with them into these courses. Some of these include the idea that race and racial classification systems are based on human biology or genetic variation; that systematic disenfranchisement by race ended with the culmination of the Civil War, the civil rights movement, or the election of the nation’s first Black president; or that evidence for the persistence of racial discrimination is difficult to establish or does not exist. In teaching these topics semester after semester, it can become difficult for professors to summon the patience and empathy needed to engage students in early stages of critical awareness, particularly given how often we hear the same misperceptions. Furthermore, for instructors who may be wary of broaching these questions and discussing them in the classroom, a text that places the latest research at their fingertips can lead to essential learning in an area of sociology often fraught with controversy and silence.

Drawing from our experience of teaching race for nearly 20 years, we believe professors would find it useful to have an engaging text that comprehensively and succinctly addresses the most common misconceptions about race held by students (and by many in the United States, in general). In this book, we have put together a collection of short essays that draw on the latest sociological research on these topics. It is a “one-stop-shopping” reader on the racial topics most often pondered by students and derived from their interests, questions, and concerns. Many scholars write on these topics in various places (e.g., journal articles, books, readers), but what is often lacking is a systematic deconstruction of specific, widely shared myths repeated often by students. Moreover, with other readers, the professor is left to pull out the key pieces of information in each reading, provide the additional supporting information to debunk a particular myth, and create a consistency in a format that is understandable to students. However, the concise and topic-specific, short-essay format we use here aims to facilitate quicker movement from acknowledging misperceptions about race to examining and discussing sociological evidence. Each of our contributors has also provided excellent

follow-up discussion questions for in-class work and suggested out-of-class activities that can help students apply their new knowledge to their everyday lives.

What we saw as necessary, and what drove us to put this collection together, is the work of “translation.” The information contained in these essays is available in many other places, and given our space constraints, we point to those outside sources at the end of each essay. What we saw happen in our own courses was that students often had difficulty connecting the primary text readings to the specific kinds of misinformation and misunderstanding they brought with them. We have tried to build a reader that speaks both languages—the language of the commonly held myths and the language of social science—so that the two are together in one book. Our contributors are those who have written books and articles on these topics or who have been “in the trenches” teaching these topics on a regular basis. As scholars who consistently cover these issues in the classroom and in their scholarship, they are well versed in the latest scholarly literature on controversial racial topics such as these.

The primary target audience for this text is lower level or introductory race and ethnicity or diversity courses, especially those in the core or general education curriculum. Courses of this kind are taught every semester in colleges and universities across the country; approximate class sizes are between 30 and 60 students. Other courses where this text might be useful include education courses, social psychology of race or racism courses, introduction to higher education courses, and ethnic studies courses.

Our hope is that this reader will make the work of translation less difficult for the many excellent instructors all across the country engaging these topics in their classes every semester.

## Suggested Additional Resource

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Fox, H. (2009). *“When race breaks out”: Conversations about race and racism in college classrooms*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.



# Acknowledgments

Putting together an edited volume is no small task and requires the assistance of many. As we were deciding on which topics would be covered, we sought the advice of treasured colleagues and friends who gave us the benefit of their many years of experience in the classroom. We would like to thank Nikki Khanna, Keisha Edwards Tassie, Michelle Petrie, Ronald J. O. Flores, Afshan Jafar, Michallene McDaniel, Kelly Manley, Victoria Bruce, Michael Ramirez, and E. M. “Woody” Beck for their input and support during the early stages of our project and for the sage advice and wisdom they offered along the way. We would also like to thank Eve Oettinger, David Repetto, Jeff Lasser, Lauren Johnson, Diane McDaniel, Judith Newlin, Nick Pachelli, Stephanie Palermini, Diane DiMura, Bennie Clark Allen, and the rest of the team at SAGE who worked tirelessly to get this project off the ground and make our vision a reality.

This project is the product of teaching these topics to thousands of students in race and ethnicity courses over many years. In that time, we have witnessed and moderated many challenging discussions—discussions that remind us just how much there is left to know in this area and how important it is that instructors continue to do this difficult work, while having the tools to do so. We thank all of the students we have had over the years, as it is their questions and insights that fueled this anthology.

Finally, we would like to express our great appreciation and gratitude to the contributing authors for lending us their expertise and for writing essays that were better than we could have even hoped for when we first envisioned this project. We are honored and humbled to have you as colleagues and are beyond grateful for all you did to make this volume come to life.

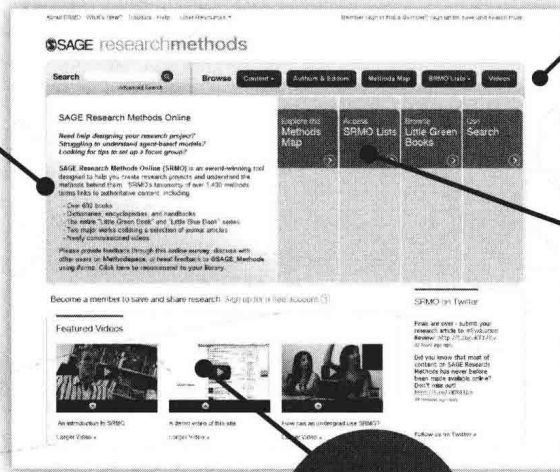


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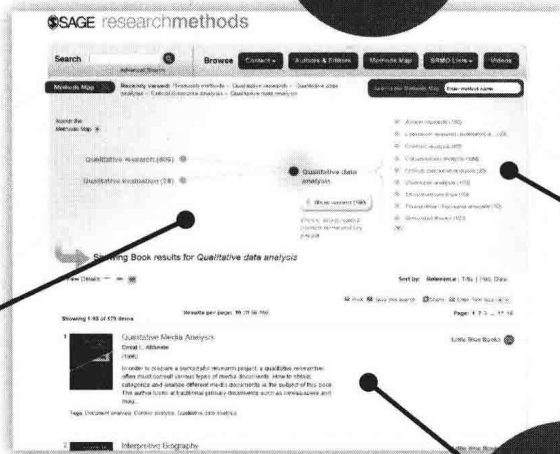


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# Contents

**Preface** ix

**Acknowledgments** xi

**I. LAYING THE FOUNDATION** 1

In this section, essay authors introduce key concepts and ideas regarding race and racial inequality. These include how race is socially constructed and how the construction process connects with questions of biology, history, and power. The essays also provide students with information about how and why we need to engage in meaningful, inclusive conversations about race in contemporary American society.

Essay 1: "But My Mother Says It's Rude to Talk About Race!": How and Why We Need to Discuss Race in the United States 3

Cherise A. Harris and Stephanie M. McClure

Essay 2: "What Is Racism Anyway?": Understanding the Basics of Racism and Prejudice 15

Beverly Daniel Tatum

Essay 3: "They Should Get Over It!": The End of Racial Discrimination? 25

Matthew W. Hughey

Essay 4: "Blacks Are Naturally Good Athletes": The Myth of a Biological Basis for Race 39

Daniel Buffington

## II. DEBUNKING INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES

51

The essays in this section consider widespread individual attitudes and beliefs about the current state of racial inequality in the United States, including beliefs about color-blindness, meritocracy, and structures of opportunity. The authors compare these perceptions to social science research and information in psychology, sociology, history, and media studies. The information presented helps students consider the validity of these popular attitudes.

- Essay 5: "If People Stopped Talking About Race, It Wouldn't Be a Problem Anymore": Silencing the Myth of a Color-Blind Society 53  
Ted Thornhill
- Essay 6: "Oprah, Obama, and Cosby Say Blacks Should Just Work Harder, Isn't That Right?": The Myth of Meritocracy 67  
Paula Ioanide
- Essay 7: "If Only He Hadn't Worn the Hoodie . . .": Race, Selective Perception, and Stereotype Maintenance 79  
Rashawn Ray
- Essay 8: "Asians Are Doing Great, So That Proves Race Really Doesn't Matter Anymore": The Model Minority Myth and the Sociological Reality 91  
Min Zhou
- Essay 9: "But Muslims Aren't Like Us!": Deconstructing Myths About Muslims in America 101  
Jen'nan Ghazal Read
- Essay 10: "It's Just a Mascot!": The Dark Side of Sports Symbols 111  
D. Stanley Eitzen and Maxine Baca Zinn

## III. INSTITUTIONS, POLICIES, AND LEGACIES OF OPPRESSION

123

Following up on the history and attitudes discussed in the previous sections, these essays consider how misperceptions and beliefs about patterns of race and racial group differences manifest across social institutions. Some of the areas addressed include the family, schools, the state and public policy, and the criminal justice system. In this section, the authors consider the impact of legal history,

individual perceptions and beliefs, and media representations of racial dynamics.

### **FAMILY**

Essay 11: "But What About the Children?": Understanding Contemporary Attitudes Toward Interracial Dating 125  
Nikki Khanna

Essay 12: "Blacks Don't Value Marriage as Much as Other Groups": Examining Structural Inequalities in Black Marriage Patterns 141  
Dawne M. Mouzon

### **EDUCATION**

Essay 13: "Well, That Culture Really Values Education": Culture Versus Structure in Educational Attainment 153  
Emily Meanwell, Hersheda Patel, and  
Stephanie M. McClure

Essay 14: "They Don't Want to Be Integrated, They Even Have Their Own Greek Organizations": History, Institutional Context, and "Self-Segregation" 169  
Stephanie M. McClure

Essay 15: "I Had a Friend Who Had Worse Scores Than Me and He Got Into a Better College": The Legal and Social Realities of the College Admissions Process 179  
OiYan Poon

### **POLITICS, SOCIAL POLICY, AND THE STATE**

Essay 16: "Black People Voted for Obama Just Because He's Black": Group Identification and Voting Patterns 195  
Veronica L. Womack, James Bridgeforth, and  
Bre'Auna Beasley

Essay 17: "We Don't Have to Listen to Al Sharpton Anymore": Obama's Election and Triumphalist Media Narratives of Post-Racial America 207  
Enid Logan

Essay 18: "We Need to Take Care of 'Real Americans' First": Historical and Contemporary Definitions of Citizenship 219  
Kara Cebulko

Essay 19: "If Black People Aren't Criminals, Then Why Are So Many of Them in Prison?": Confronting Racial Biases in Perceptions of Crime and Criminals 233  
Sara Buck Doude

Essay 20: "Now All the Good Jobs Go to Them!": Affirmative Action in the Labor Market 245  
Wendy Leo Moore

#### **IV. RACE IN EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS 257**

This final selection of essays returns students to the level of the individual and considers some of the key questions they may have as they look to engage in further conversation about race. The topics addressed encourage the kind of meaningful dialogue that is necessary to help students think more carefully about how they engage others.

Essay 21: "Native American/Indian, Asian/Oriental, Latino/Hispanic . . . Who Cares?": Language and the Power of Self-Definition 259  
Bradley Koch

Essay 22: "Why Do They Get to Use the N-Word But I Can't?": Privilege, Power, and the Politics of Language 269  
Geoff Harkness

Essay 23: "I'm Not Racist. Some of My Best Friends Are . . . ": The Shift From Being a "Friend" to Becoming an Ally 281  
Cherise A. Harris

#### **About the Editors 295**

**PART I**

# **Laying the Foundation**



## ESSAY 1

# "But My Mother Says It's Rude to Talk About Race!"

*How and Why We Need to Discuss Race in the United States*

Cherise A. Harris  
*Connecticut College*

Stephanie M. McClure  
*Georgia College*

**Cherise A. Harris** is an associate professor of sociology at Connecticut College. She specializes in race, class, and gender, and teaches classes on the sociology of ethnic and race relations; the sociology of inequality; race, gender, and the mass media; and middle-class minorities. Her book, *The Cosby Cohort: Blessings and Burdens of Growing up Black Middle Class*, was published in 2013. She has also published in *Teaching Sociology*, *Sociological Spectrum*, and *Journal of African American Studies*.

**Stephanie M. McClure** is an associate professor of sociology at Georgia College. She teaches classes on racial stratification, social theory, and the sociology of education. Her research interests are in the area of higher education, with a focus on college student persistence and retention across race, class, and gender, and a special emphasis on postcollege student experiences that increase student social and academic integration. She has published in the *Journal of Higher Education*, *Symbolic Interaction*, and *The Journal of African American Studies*.



In spite of our hesitance to talk about them, racial myths permeate our social world. They are frequently present in the mass media and public discourse as well as in our everyday conversations with each other. Perhaps in your dorm rooms, dining halls, workplaces, or on social media, you have heard a variation on the following statements:

- We have a Black president which means racism doesn't exist anymore.
- We need to look out for "real Americans" first, not immigrants.
- *Native American/Indian, Asian/Oriental, Latino/Hispanic*. Why does it matter what we call them?
- Asian Americans are doing very well. If other racial groups had their values, they would do well also.
- I know a minority who got worse scores than me and he got into a better college!
- I'm in favor of interracial dating and marriage but the children from these unions suffer.
- I don't know why people are so upset about team names like the *Washington Redskins*. It's really just a way of honoring Native American culture.

These kinds of statements reflect a great deal of the conventional wisdom around race. We define *conventional wisdom* as the received body of knowledge informally shared by a group or society that is often unstated, internally inconsistent, and resistant to change. This conventional wisdom is full of racial myths and misunderstandings. In this reader, we look at common racial myths that we and many sociology professors and race scholars have heard from their students in race courses. In this essay, we will give you the tools with which to navigate this reader and introduce some key ideas and questions to help you navigate discussions about race both inside and outside of the classroom.

Early in our schooling, we learn a simplified history of America's founding that ignores the significant levels of racial conflict and inequality that existed. For instance, it is often stated that America was founded on ideals of freedom and equality for all, an image that ignores the many groups who were excluded from that freedom and equality, namely people of color. We also tend to think that racial or ethnic strife happened sometime *after* that idealized founding. However, as sociologist Joe Feagin (2010) notes in his book, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing*, "Racial oppression was not added later on in the development of [U.S.] society, but was the foundation of the original colonial and U.S. social systems, and it remains as a foundation to the present day" (p. vii). Yet, there is still a tendency in American society to gloss over this history or in other ways minimize the import of race. We see this minimization in the present day when political pundits and others in the media characterize our society as *post-racial*, asserting that race no longer determines one's life chances or determines them to a far lesser extent than it once did.

Indeed, since the election of President Barack Obama, we have been hearing more and more that we have moved beyond race, despite much evidence to the contrary. To be sure, the election of the nation's first Black president signaled a significant shift in the tenor of race relations in the United States. For this reason, you