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POWERFUL IDEAS, PRACTICAL ACTIONS

DISCUSSION GUIDE | ISSUE 53 | AMERICA: THE REMIX

YES! DISCUSSION GUIDES are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change. You can find the articles mentioned below on our website at www.yesmagazine.org. You are welcome to download and photocopy them free of charge. If you'd like to purchase multiple copies of YES! or subscriptions for your class or group, please phone 800/937-4451 and ask for the Discussion Group Discount.



Ashlee Green

The election of Obama signaled to the world that the U.S. has made great strides forward on race, but it's clear we're not done reckoning with racism and inequity. In the last year, we've seen racially charged rhetoric dominate political and media discussions. Meanwhile, communities of color are still faring worse than white Americans and having a harder time recovering from the economic downturn and waves of job losses.

Still, there are promising signs that the political energy ignited during Obama's campaign can have momentum. Across the country, communities are crossing racial lines to unite on issues like green jobs, political organizing, and social justice. It's time to bond together across former class and racial boundaries and demand a fair world for

everyone. In Issue 53, "America: The Remix: Can Our Diversity Be Our Strength?" YES! Magazine brings you stories about the inner and outer work we'll need to do to bridge cultural and racial divisions and to work together to bring about change.

At the heart of this discussion guide are the following articles:

America: The Remix (Panel Discussion)

YES! executive editor Sarah van Gelder asks a panel of visionaries to offer their perspectives on race in America. What would it mean to change our country's self-image and truly accept that we're a multiracial nation? Organizer Biko Baker and journalist Robert Jensen say we need to recognize that white dominance is a sham sociological construct that doesn't reflect the diversity of our society.

Carl Anthony believes change will require Americans to take responsibility for our own society, rather than blaming our political leadership. According to activists Adrienne Maree Brown and Carlos Jimenez, we'll need to embrace the true interrelatedness of our work across issues and racial lines.

1. Experts predict that by 2042, whites will be in the minority in the United States. America's culture and history have long been influenced by its diverse cultural and racial heritage, but many Americans still feel that they're living in a white-dominated society. What would it take to change our cultural self-image to include all races? How would embracing this idea change your own perceptions of political or personal issues?

2. What strengths do different generations bring to our understanding of race? How can each generation benefit from the other?

3. Do you believe our political system is Eurocentric or white-dominated? Jensen says it will be hard to change that system and make it more inclusive. Carl Anthony disagrees. What do you believe?

United by Hard Times

Americans are not yet living in a "post-racial" world, Carlos Jimenez writes. But our tough times offer us an opportunity to connect and learn about one another. Efforts like the union Unite Here's "Hotels Workers Rising" Campaign—where hotel workers organize together for employment rights—are helping communities of different races find common ground and unite to bring about political change.

1. Jimenez writes that racial divisions have often kept communities from working together, even when they have common interests. Think about the political and economic issues you are concerned about. How do they affect your community? How might you share common ground with communities who have different racial or socioeconomic makeup than your own? How might you work together on common concerns?

2. What are the stories that divide us along racial, economic, and cultural lines? How could we change those stories in personal interactions, in political work, in the media?

My Life in Black and White

Faith Adiele candidly shares her experience as a multiracial author and educator. She explores the parallels between teaching creative writing and social justice advocacy and describes how writing your own story gives you the chance to redefine our collective history as Americans.

1. What is your experience of race? How might telling that story free you to become a more vocal participant in your community or in social or political issues?

2. Adiele asks her students to imagine what it would be like to belong to a different racial, cultural, or gender group than your own. Try this exercise yourself. How would your life change? How does this "imagining" change your understanding of the experience of other communities, or of your own?

What White People Fear

Robert Jensen writes about the racial biases that exist in both conservative and liberal circles. Such biases, he says, stem from fear: White people fear losing their "white-centric world," in which diversity and multiculturalism are welcomed as long as white authority still wins out. Such conversations are the first step to changing power hierarchies, Jensen says, but they aren't enough. To truly overcome racism, white Americans will need to let go of "white centrality"—where white values and experiences are the norm.

1. What is your experience with race and diversity dialogues and trainings? Do you agree with Jensen that such dialogues have shortcomings? How might you move beyond talk to create situations that truly challenge racial hierarchy and political power?

2. Do you believe that white people fear the loss of their "centrality?" How would our political system look different if white values and experiences were not the norm? How would that change our media and culture? How might it affect your life and values?

3. Jensen says "I can rest comfortably in the privileges that come with being white, or I can struggle to be fully human." Do you believe that it's necessary to let go of privilege to be fully human? How might your feelings about race be interfering with the full expression of your humanity?



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What Do You Say to This?

Pramila Jayapal, founder and director of the national immigrant-advocacy group OneAmerica, goes on live broadcast to confront conservative talk-radio hosts about their political views and values. She's learned how to remain composed and find common ground with them, all for the chance of reaching a few viewers or listeners. She shares her tips on interacting with pundits and on having open dialogues about race with others.

1. What experience do you have with "shock" radio or television? How do you think such media outlets influence conversation, on both a personal and political level? How should the progressive movement engage with these outlets?

2. What do you believe is the appropriate way to confront racist rhetoric on television and on radio? What about in personal conversations?

3. Discuss your experience talking with others who

disagree with your values and viewpoints. What has made you uncomfortable in those settings? How might you find common ground and have respectful conversations with those you disagree with?

4. Have you ever felt reluctant to talk to your family about racism? Your friends? Why or why not? How might you overcome that reluctance?

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