



# FACILITATOR MANUAL

*American Textures Clips*

*Debrief Questions*

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## INTRODUCTION

Dear Facilitator,

A Culture of Dialogue is urgently needed at a time when oversimplified and hostile messages dominate our public discourse and polarize our societies. Unresolved or vaguely addressed issues of race and inequity around the globe are often exacerbated by media platforms promoting discussions that result in overly simplistic or unproductive commentary. Dialogue is a tool that can help our communities move together, heal and strengthen. Through dialogue, universities and communities can use the differences that threaten to fragment us to weave adaptable, strong communities. In a society where divisive debate leads to increased separation, we are seeking to support students and citizens to come together and develop the skills to truly see and hear each other so we may begin to build bridges of unity.

Furthermore, social inequalities have enabled dominant cultural groups to decide what gets taught and who gets heard, essentially shutting out minority groups from participation in authentic, deep democracy. Everyone suffers through the lack of expression of their full humanity when oppressed. Through initiating constructive dialogues, we aim to support healing changes in the way we communicate with each other and help to restore our collective humanity.

Thank you for offering your awareness, talent and time to initiate dialogues. You don't need to be an expert in race relations to support this process. You simply need the willingness to learn, to be vulnerable and to discover personal blind-spots. You need the commitment to check your own intentions and help create safe spaces in which constructive dialogues on race can unfold.

Yes, we may make mistakes when exploring painful issues. But if we are prepared to recognize them, if we are prepared to own them, then they do not have to mark the end of the dialogue. On the contrary, they can become indicators of the thresholds where we start to grow deeper understanding, interconnectedness and forgiveness.

Our best wishes for your process,

Arnd Wächter and Kate McConnell

## OVERVIEW

### Facilitator Manual

This manual supports you with Debrief Questions around 14 thematic short clips (3-10 min. each) that highlight key themes and topics from the film [American Textures](#) for deeper, focused exploration.

### Preparations

Enhance your communication and facilitation skills by exploring the following CBE website pages:

- [American Textures](#) and the Related Pages
- [Host a Screening](#)
- [Initiating Interracial Dialogue](#)

### Goals

Through constructive intergroup dialogue we aim:

- To support intercultural and interracial communication in safe and constructive ways.
- To foster critical thinking, self-awareness, and empathy building.
- To help overcome the separation between people of different nationalities, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds.

### Outcomes

Through constructive intergroup dialogue we are working towards the following outcomes:

- **Intercultural Understanding:** Support participants' openness to hear and value a variety of perspectives and understand the power of diversity.
- **Cross-Cultural Communication:** Grow participants' skills and capacities to communicate across differences.
- **Civic Engagement:** Increase participants' awareness of their potential to make an active contribution to social, human or world issues.
- **Self-Awareness:** Enhance participants' abilities to communicate personal challenges and to learn how to deal with issues around diversity.

## **A NOTE ON SAFETY**

During screenings of *American Textures* we noticed there can be a significant amount of trepidation and insecurity around approaching the topic of race when it comes up in the classroom or community. Some of this fear seems to be deeply engrained in our psyche and we want to support creating initial encounters as non-threatening. Furthermore, we want participants to co-create safe spaces where these conversations can naturally unfold. For this reason, creating norms and guidelines with each group is key before entering group dialogue.

Essential in creating safe spaces is optional and incremental involvement from participants at a pace and format that is manageable for them to process. For this reason, we strongly suggest preliminary journaling exercises after film clips to give participants a chance to self-reflect before engaging in the group discussion. Further, as active listening and empathy are vital skills we need to cultivate, we have included multiple one-on-one dyad activities where intimacy and vulnerability can be explored in pairs before a large group sharing.

Ultimately, the protagonists in the film modeled the potential of taking risks in dialogue and portrayed the benefits of deeper understanding that grows from opening up, active listening and authentic sharing. This blueprint can help to encourage participants to recognize their own natural abilities for initiating dialogues that help grow a society in which all people can feel safe, no matter what skin color they have!

## **NORMS TO CREATE SAFE SPACES FOR CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE**

**Facilitator:** Ask participants what group norms they feel are needed in order to create a safe space and constructive dialogue. Write these norms on a flip chart or piece of paper for everyone to see. You may use some of the points below as examples to set the tone.

### **Norms & Guidelines to support creating a safe space:**

We want to actively foster a community of constructive dialogues with practical norms and intentions, such as:

- Committing to create a safe, supportive and respectful atmosphere for all.
- Listening with an open mind and heart.
- Supporting others by giving them room to speak and contribute and by according them full attention, without interrupting!
- Participate actively in ways we are ready for (active listening, verbal, journaling, etc.)
- Being honest. Making "I" not "we" statements

**We want to support the group process with guidelines such as:**

- Sharing is voluntary and is about one's own feelings, experiences, perceptions, etc.
- We are not always going to agree or see everything the same way and that's O.K.
- Each person has a right to and responsibility for his or her own feelings, thoughts, and beliefs.
- Avoid criticism or judgement about another person's sharing, point of view, and/or feelings.
- Support real exchanges with each other but avoid getting tied up in polarized debate and forceful argument, as it rarely changes anyone and tends to inhibit a constructive culture of dialogue.
- Refrain from singling out any individual as "representing" his or her group or issue.
- Aim to remember that we can only change ourselves. However, as role models, our change and growth may inspire someone else.

**Facilitator:** Display the group norms for everyone to see and add two or three missing elements from the list above. Encourage participants to remember the list during the dialogue. Add additional details to the list when needed during dialogues.

## **FILM CLIPS AND DEBRIEF QUESTIONS**

### **Introduction to the Toolkit Series**

The Facilitator (F) briefly explains the format of the toolkit prior to, or at the beginning of, the first session. Include mentioning the following:

- The toolkit series includes 14 clips total (though they can be used singly or in clusters based on desired dialogue themes and available time).
- Participants are encouraged to have a journal handy for the written, self-reflection exercises that are an essential part of the debrief exercises.
- The facilitator will support the group process by introducing some key concepts and debrief questions.
- Each session is interactive, and will ask participants to share their perspectives in various ways (e.g. journaling, small and large group discussions, etc.). Participation is completely voluntarily, but participants can be reminded that 'you get out what you put into this dialogue process.' The Journals are meant to provide space for personal reflection before entering the larger group discussion.
- If there is additional time, activities can be expanded to allow deepening dialogues (See attached appendix for resources on further research and exploration of these topics).

## Film Clip 1: *Why initiate Dialogue?*

Total debrief time 10-20 min

### Facilitator

Reads clip summary aloud

### Clip Summary

*Conflict facilitator Ana describes how confronting conflicts through dialogue can lead to increased awareness, deepened relationships and growth of personal strengths.*

### Screening

Show to the group Film Clip 1. *Why Initiate Dialogue?* (2 min)

### Debrief Questions / Pair Shares

Facilitator (F) explains: Ask students to get into groups of two. Explain that each partner takes a turn speaking for one minute, while the other SIMPLY LISTENS, without interrupting, responding, or reacting in any way to what is said as they each answer the questions below. This segment will be timed by the F with a bell or some indicator when 60 seconds is up, in order to give the other partner a chance to speak. It is important for this short exercise that there is no side-talking, nor should the second participant use his/her time to respond to what participant A has said.

1. What strengths do you see in dialogue?
2. What personal qualities are needed to engage in dialogue?

### Debrief Question / Journal

How was the experience of just being heard and just listening different for you than how you typically communicate?

### Debrief Question / Large Group

Who is ready to share how the experience of active listening and being heard felt for them?



## Film Clip 2: *On Images of the Other*

Total debrief time 15-30 min

### Facilitator

Reads clip summary aloud

### Clip Summary

*The protagonists start to step outside their comfort zones and explore if they feel safe enough to risk speaking their respective truths on tough topics, from race, privilege, and power to their own personal pain.*

### Screening

Show to the group Film Clip 2: *On Images of the Other* (3 min)

### Debrief Questions / Journal

Facilitator reads, then gives participants 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts.

1. How hard or easy is it for you to speak your Truth in front of people you've just met?
2. What do you need to feel safe in order to freely speak your Truth?

### Debrief Questions / Pair Shares (5 min)

Facilitator reminds participants of the Pair-Share Protocol – one minute each of uninterrupted sharing where they complete the following sentences, then switch speakers for the second minute. F, please alert participants when one minute is up with a bell, gong, chime, etc.

- My biggest fears about bringing up the topic of race are...
- My hopes for initiating conversation on race (at home, school, in community) are...

### Debrief Question / Large Group

- Who is ready to share some of the issues that came up as hopes/fears around this dialogue? (Facilitator notes trends and writes them on a flip chart.)
- What (qualities, group norms, guidelines) would help create a safer space for people to talk about race relations issues?

### Facilitator Note

This segment is used to support solidarity among group participants in allowing them to see that they are not alone, as many share similar hopes and fears. This process supports building a safe container for dialogues.

## Film Clip 3: *On Gentrification*

Total debrief time: 20-30 min

### Facilitator

Reads clip summary aloud

### Clip Summary

*The group starts to explore the neighborhoods of Asheville, NC and learn from the locals about the historically segregated communities that are now predominantly white-owned. Local residents describe attitudes among local politicians that perpetuate gentrification in certain neighborhoods. The pain and frustration for those who experience this discrimination on a daily basis is brought to the forefront. (Key Concepts: Gentrification, Economic Segregation, Discrimination, Jim Crow)*

### Screening

Show to the group. Film Clip 3: *On Gentrification* (9 min)

### Debrief Questions / Journal

Facilitator reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- What are your thoughts and feelings when you learn about Gentrification in this clip?
- Do you know if there are similar issues happening in your own community?

### Debrief Question / Large Group

- Who is ready to share about the journal prompts?
- Do people in your context address issues of race, class, and privilege? Why or why not?
- How diverse is your circle of friends? How does that affect the topics you discuss?

### Facilitator Note

Note answers down on a flip chart at the front of the room.

## Film Clip 4: *Migrant Dreams*

Total debrief time 20-30 min

### Facilitator

Reads clip summary aloud

### Clip Summary

*Salvador takes us on a heartbreaking journey inside his home and opens up about his personal history and pain in a segment that puts a human face on the daily life and struggles of undocumented immigrants in our country that are so often scapegoated by politicians for job scarcity, crime, and other problems in our country.*

### Screening

Show to the group Film Clip 4: *Migrant Dreams* (9 min)

### Debrief Questions / Journal

F reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- What feelings were you left with after hearing Salvador's story? Could you relate to any parts? Were you surprised by what you saw and heard?

### Debrief Question / Large Group

- Who is ready to share their writings on the journal prompts?
- What might be reasons we hear so few personal migrant stories?
- What resources do you consult for facts and/or personal stories about immigration?
- What might motivate politicians to obscure or distort information about immigrants?

## **Film Clip 5: *On Privileges***

Total debrief time 15-30 min

### **Facilitator**

Reads clip summary aloud

### **Clip Summary**

*Salvador shares his experience growing up in Los Angeles where gang violence and fear of the threat of harm to his physical wellbeing are a daily reality. Colin, having grown up in a relatively safe and segregated white community, reacts with feelings of amazement at how well-adjusted Salvador seems despite the constant threat of violence.*

### **Screening**

Show to the group Film Clip 5: *On Privileges* (3 min)

### **Debrief Questions / Journal**

F reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- How much does fear factor into your daily life due to the environment you live in? How do you cope with that?

### **Debrief Questions / Pair Shares (5 min):**

- Listening to Salvador speak about the dangers and constant threat in his community, I felt...
- If more people from different racial backgrounds had a chance to share the reality of what their daily life is like, I think race relations would ...

### **Debrief Question / Large Group:**

- What did you discover in your pair share questions?

## Film Clip 6: *On Breaking Down Barriers*

Total debrief time 20-30 min

### Facilitator

Reads clip summary aloud

### Clip Summary

*In this segment, Kenya and Tarrah struggle to find a common language to communicate around complex issues. After misunderstandings, the two have a clearing where Kenya encourages Tarrah to stay open to exploring her blind spots around the realities how black people experience racism in the US. Kenya also expresses the need for white people to grow in their capacity to truly listen to a person of color speak of their ancestral and collective pain around racism without taking it as a personal attack or becoming defensive.*

### Screening

Show to the group Film Clip 6: *On Breaking Down Barriers* (10 min)

### Debrief Questions / Journal

F reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- A time I had a blind spot (an aspect of your personality or worldview that is hidden from your own perception, but might be visible to another when interacting) pointed out to me was...
- In response to this feedback, I felt...

### Debrief Questions / Pair Shares (5 min)

(Facilitator reminds participants of the Pair-Share Protocol: to speak uninterrupted for two minutes each without responding or talking in between...)

- When I am misunderstood by someone else, it makes me feel...
- A time I was directly impacted by issues of race was... (you may have been in Tarrah's or Kenya's role)

### Debrief Question / Large Group

- What did you discover in your pair share questions?

## Film Clip 7: *On Civic Rights*

Total debrief time 15-30 min

### Facilitator

Reads clip summary aloud

### Clip Summary

*The group watches a powerful short video showing some graphic images of violence inflicted against African-Americans by police during the Civil Rights Era. The characters sit with the intensity of this often untold or unseen story of the movement and reflect on the feelings they are left with.*

### Screening

Show to the group Film Clip 7: *On Civic Rights* (3 min)

### Debrief Questions / Journal

F reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- What emotions are stirring within you after watching that segment? What in your view are the best ways to raise social awareness within society? What role does education play in learning about social injustices within society?

### Debrief Questions / Pair Shares

(Facilitator reminds participants of the Pair-Share Protocol; to speak for two minutes each uninterrupted and without responding or talking in between...)

- A way I feel immediately inspired to act after watching this clip is to...

### Debrief Question / Large Group

- Why do you think the harrowing footage from this documentary is seldom seen and studied in classrooms in the US? What could you do to re-educate yourself? How would you like to see the next generation of students learn about the civil rights movement?

## **Film Clip 8: *On Social Separation***

Total debrief time 15-30 min

### **Facilitator**

Reads clip summary aloud

### **Clip Summary**

*In this clip, we witness the power of ethnic, racial, socio-economic divides that keep people separate from others with different backgrounds in our larger society. It's dynamic is active even within this small group of six well-meaning individuals who have committed to this project precisely to break down those barriers.*

### **Screening**

Show to the group Film Clip 8: *On Social Separation* (5 min)

### **Debrief Questions / Journal**

F reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- How segregated or diverse a group of friends did you grow up with? Do you make a conscious effort to get to know/hang out with people who are different from you?

### **Debrief Questions / Pair Shares**

(Facilitator reminds participants of the Pair-Share Protocol: to speak uninterrupted for two minutes each without responding or talking in between...)

- A time I tried to connect with someone, but felt we were speaking different languages was... This made me feel...

### **Debrief Question / Large Group**

- How would you respond if a racist comment was made in your classroom or community? Do you feel it's the teachers/leaders responsibility to intervene? What is your role when you witness racist acts or statements in your context?

## Film Clip 9: *On Using Privileges*

Total debrief time 15-30 min

### Facilitator

Reads clip summary aloud

### Clip Summary

*In this clip, we learn more about Marisa's experience as the daughter of a mother who immigrated from Mexico and a father of European descent. With awareness of her mother's struggles in childhood, Marisa expresses her gratitude for the blessings and opportunities she had in life and her desire to use her personal privileges to give back to individuals in her community.*

### Screening

Show to the group Film Clip 9: *On Using Privileges* (5 min)

### Debrief Questions / Journal

F reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- Can you think of a time you judged someone without knowing them and/or felt judged by someone who didn't know your background (e.g. ethnic, racial, socio-economic, sexual orientation, etc.)

### Debrief Questions / Pair Shares

(Facilitator reminds participants of the Pair-Share Protocol: to speak uninterrupted for two minutes each without responding or talking in between...)

- An experience that awakened me to the realities of Others with a different background than mine was...
- A way I give back to society in return for the opportunities I have enjoyed is...

### Debrief Question / Large Group

- What campus or community-based organizations nearby would open our eyes to the experience and realities of others with different backgrounds?



## 10. Film Clip: *On Comfort Zones*

Total debrief time 15-30 min

### Facilitator

Reads clip summary aloud

### Clip Summary

*The group visits a southern slave plantation where the guide focuses predominantly on the historical perspective of the plantation owners and hardly refers to the slaves themselves! Santos feels overwhelmed at the depth of black history on this land and incredulous that their story is being omitted. Colin has the realization that for most of his life he has been learning the 'white person's' history.*

### Screening

Show to the group Film Clip 10: *On Comfort Zones* (3 min)

### Debrief Questions / Journal

F reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- Respond to the following statement: *"History is just one tool to shape our understanding of our world. And every tool is a weapon if you hold it right."* Do you think history is both a tool and a weapon? Do you feel it has been used for or against you in our society? And in your educational experience?

### Debrief Questions / Pair Shares

(Facilitator reminds participants of the Pair-Share Protocol: to speak uninterrupted for two minutes each without responding or talking in between...)

- If I could rewrite history, one thing I would change is...
- If I had an influence on our education system a priority that I would change is...

### Debrief Question / Large Group

What feelings and thoughts did you have watching the video clip?

- What did you discover in your journal prompts? In your pair share questions?

## Film Clip 11: *On Social Justice*

Total debrief time 20-30 min

### Facilitator

Reads clip summary aloud

### Clip Summary

*In one of their most frank conversations yet, the group has an emotionally charged conversation about the legacy of slavery and each racial group's respective ability and responsibility to redress the historical legacy they've inherited. Santos/Kenya provide historical context to the current racial reality and Kenya elucidates several factors that might keep African-Americans from collaborating with white counterparts eager to collaborate in a struggle for racial justice. Colin and Kenya clash over different communication styles.*

### Screening

Show to the group the 11. Film Clip: *On Social Justice* (10 min)

### Debrief Questions / Journal

F reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- What are the feelings and thoughts that arise within you during this tense conversation?
- Is there a character in the film you identified with more than the others? If so, how did s/he mirror your feelings when engaging in interracial dialogue?

### Debrief Question / Large Group

- Do you think past generations actions have an influence on today's society? Why or why not?
- Do you think current generations have a historical responsibility to redress the legacy of their ancestor's actions? Why or why not? How might they do this?

## **Film Clip 12: *On Social Realities***

Total debrief time 15-30 min

### **Facilitator**

Reads clip summary aloud

### **Clip Summary**

*Colin and Santos get a "reality tour" from Maceo of the Bluff, one of Atlanta's poorest neighborhoods. They immerse with local residents and ask how they come together to overcome social and economic obstacles. Colin shares a time where he recognized his "whiteness" created an advantage in the legal system at a difficult moment in his life.*

### **Screening**

Show to the group Film Clip 12: *On Social Realities* (5 min)

### **Debrief Questions / Journal**

F reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- Reflect on your childhood/where you grew up: What head-starts did your background give you? What challenges did you have to overcome?

### **Debrief Question / Large Group**

- What feelings and thoughts did you have watching the video clip?
- Who are your role models? Are they more current or historical/ancestral?

**Film Clip 13: *The Power of Frankness*** (refer to Appendix A below for more background information on Rank and Privilege)

Total debrief time 15-30 min

**Facilitator**

Reads clip summary aloud

**Clip Summary**

*Kenya introduces the concept of micro-aggressions. Concepts of rank and privilege in who gets to determine the tone and style of communication are brought up.*

**Screening:**

Show to the group Film Clip 13: *The Power of Frankness* (3 min)

**Debrief Questions / Journal**

F reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- Do you feel guilty about your role within society around issues of race? (whether as a recipient of advantages or your own story with internalized oppression or unconscious biases)
- What different effects can the feeling of guilt have on us? What are ways how we could use these feelings constructively?

**Debrief Questions / Pair Shares**

(Facilitator reminds participants of the Pair-Share Protocol: to speak uninterrupted for two minutes each without responding or talking in between...)

- My attitude toward conflict is ...
- The way I prefer to receive information is ...

**Debrief Question / Large Group**

- How does conflict affect you?
- In what contexts do you witness micro-aggressions?
- Share your thoughts and feelings from the journal questions and pair shares.

**Film Clip 14: *Embracing Diversity*** (refer to Appendix B below for more background information on *White Fragility* and associated triggers)

**Total debrief time** 15-30 min

**Facilitator**

Reads clip summary aloud

**Clip Summary**

*After prolonged misunderstanding, Colin develops the stamina to hear both Kenya's personal pain and her explanation of the collective pain of Black people around racism. He realizes that it is far more than a personal attack and that his work is to listen, feel and acknowledge. Marissa appreciates Kenya for her strength and daring to move beyond numbness into authentic self-expression. Colin and Santos acknowledge the important work ahead for people to grow the capacity to confront issues of race within society.*

**Screening**

Show to the group Film Clip 14: *Embracing Diversity* (8 min)

**Debrief Questions / Journal**

F reads, then gives 5 minutes (timed) to free write on the following journal prompts:

- What for you is the message of the resolution between the group?
- Who inspired you in your life to face challenges? Who taught you how to have a voice and not be afraid to use it?

**Debrief Question / Large Group**

- Why do you think it was important for Colin not to "take it personally"? What are some qualities necessary to enter racial dialogues, to stay present and hear viewpoints that might be uncomfortable and challenge one's perspective?

## APPENDIX A: BACKGROUND TO CLIP 13

### Rank and Privilege (*from the Process Work Institute*)

#### Definitions:

- **Rank** refers to the power we have relative to one another in relationships, groups, community and the world. Some kinds of rank are earned, while others are unearned. Unearned rank we acquire through birth, or by membership in a particular race, class, gender, etc.
- **Privilege** refers to the benefits and advantages that come from one's rank.

#### Effects of Rank:

- You cannot hide your rank. Others identify you with your rank because of your signals and communication style. Other people react to you as though you are aware of the rank communicated by your signals.
- Each of us has an inner sense of our own rank that is determined by a variety of factors.
- Most of us are more aware of the areas in which we feel we lack rank and less aware of areas where we are full of rank.

#### Types of Rank:

##### 1. Social Rank

One's social rank is based on consensus reality factors such as: race, gender, age, class & economics, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, education, health & physical abilities, language. People with social rank are rarely aware of it. It is mostly unconscious; it is like the air one breathes.

##### 2. Contextual Rank

Every group has its own rank structures. The power ascribed to an individual changes depending on the specific group or culture. For example, the CEO, managers and staff all have different powers because of their roles. A male CEO may have a great deal of power at work, but at home he may feel powerless. A spiritual organization may value those who are meditative and inward while a psychological group values those who express feelings openly. Contextual rank is fluid. We notice our contextual rank when we move to another context, and are seen and valued differently.

### 3. Psychological Rank

Psychological rank is acquired through life experience. It comes from many sources including:

- Having your perceptions validated as a child and having a loving parent.
- Surviving suffering and coming out stronger and more compassionate.
- Having worked through the childhood abuse.
- Self- awareness and knowing oneself.
- Receiving love and positive feedback from friends, colleagues and community..
- Living in a community that supports who you are..
- Wrestling with the ally; confronting your greatest fears.

People with psychological rank are able to use their awareness and have confidence or esteem that comes from their inner work. They are able to express themselves even in the face of great social powers. They are fluid in their ability to relate to and tolerate tension.

### 4. Spiritual Rank

Spiritual rank is independent of culture, family and the world. It comes from a variety of sources:

- Being connected with something divine or transcendent that keeps you centered even in the midst of a storm and conflict.
- A sense of great conviction; especially having “justice on your side”.
- Having had awesome and uncanny experiences.
- Being in a culture that recognizes or supports spiritual experiences..
- Transmitted by a guru- shaktipat..
- Drug experiences and altered states of consciousness.
- Loss, failure, death of loved one, trauma, and having suffered and survived
- Having a sense of your “calling” in life

People with spiritual rank are often community builders and have an uncanny ability to bring groups together.

## APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND TO CLIP 14

### Definitions and Excerpts from: *On White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo as published in the International Journal of Critical Pedagogy

(<http://libjournal.uncg.edu/index.php/ijcp/article/view/249/116>)

#### Definition

**White Fragility:** White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. This insulated environment of racial protection raises white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as White Fragility.

#### Triggers:

**White Fragility** is 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. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. Racial stress results from an interruption to what is racially familiar. These interruptions can take a variety of forms and come from a range of sources, including:

- Suggesting that a white person's viewpoint comes from a racialized frame of reference (challenge to objectivity);
- People of color talking directly about their racial perspectives (challenge to white racial codes);
- People of color choosing not to protect the racial feelings of white people in regards to race (challenge to white racial expectations and need/entitlement to racial comfort);
- People of color not being willing to tell their stories or answer questions about their racial experiences (challenge to colonialist relations);
- A fellow white not providing agreement with one's interpretations (challenge to white solidarity);
- Receiving feedback that one's behavior had a racist impact (challenge to white liberalism);



- Suggesting that group membership is significant (challenge to individualism);
- An acknowledgment that access is unequal between racial groups (challenge to meritocracy);
- Being presented with a person of color in a position of leadership (challenge to white authority);
- Being presented with information about other racial groups through, for example, movies in which people of color drive the action but are not in stereotypical roles, or multicultural education (challenge to white centrality).

In a white dominant environment, each of these challenges becomes exceptional. In turn, whites are often at a loss as to how to respond in constructive ways. Whites have not had to build the cognitive or affective skills or develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides.