



# PAST PRESENT FUTURE PUBLISHING BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

**Thank you so much for your interest in hosting a book club for *(Re)Present: Racism & Resistance in Iowa*. Feel free to modify the following suggestions to fit your needs. Feedback is welcome at [ppfpublishing@gmail.com](mailto:ppfpublishing@gmail.com).**

## GETTING COPIES OF THE BOOK

To purchase copies of the book, please visit online at [www.ppf-publishing.com](http://www.ppf-publishing.com), the Des Moines or Urbandale libraries, or purchase a copy at a local, independent bookstore: [African American History Museum of Iowa](#) ✕ [Beaverdale Books](#) ✕ [Prairie Lights](#) ✕ [Next Page Books](#) ✕ [Nos Books](#) ✕ [The Slow Down](#) ✕ [Storyhouse Bookpub](#) ✕ [Raygun](#). For any accessibility or financial accommodations, please send a note to [ppfpublishing@gmail.com](mailto:ppfpublishing@gmail.com).

## GOALS FOR A BOOK CLUB

We hope book clubs for *(Re)Present: Racism & Resistance in Iowa* will 1) counter misinformation about racism and erasure of these histories in educational institutions, the media, and government; and 2) build meaningful relationships among people who will care for each other and take actions that disrupt racism in their communities. No doubt each book club will have their own unique goals that should be clear to all participants.

## LOGISTICS OF A BOOK CLUB

We recommend no more than twenty people take part in any one book club section. More than that makes it difficult for whole group conversations and does not offer enough time for people to get to know each other in partners/small groups throughout the sessions. If the group is heterogeneous in terms of race/ethnicity, consider asking if anyone prefers affinity spaces during partner/small group breakouts during registration. This is especially important for groups meeting in spaces that are historically white-dominated and white people make up a majority of the book club. We also recommend that every book club has a designated facilitator, whether that is a rotating position among participants or the same person for each session to monitor norms, watch time, etc. We recommend dedicating at least an hour, but that goes quite fast. Two to three hours would be even better. We recommend five sessions (one for each section of the book). Last, but not least, we encourage in-person book clubs when possible with whole group seating in a circle, but have facilitated virtual book clubs with success.

## INVITING GUEST SPEAKERS TO A BOOK CLUB

If you are interested in contributors to the book speaking at a book club event, please contact Katy or Jen at PPF Publishing ([ppfpublishing@gmail.com](mailto:ppfpublishing@gmail.com)). A small stipend for people's time is not required, but always appreciated.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

To assist book club discussions, PPF Publishing has created the following discussion guide that includes suggested prompts for [Why This Book](#), [Myth 1](#), [Myth 2](#), [Myth 3](#), and [What's Next?](#).

We also recommend the following format for each session:

### → Introductions

It's important for everyone to share how they want to be addressed in the group and to learn how to pronounce everyone's name.

### → Welcome Prompts

"Icebreaker" prompts are designed for everyone in the group to quickly share their answer to a low-stakes question as a warm-up for the session. Responses could be shared in the whole group, in small groups, or in partners, depending on time and size of the group.

### → Partners & Small Groups

Dedicating time for 1-on-1 conversations and small groups helps members of the group to develop trust and concern for each other, which are necessary for healthy conversations about race and racism. It is also essential as a strategy for encouraging people to share, as not everyone wants to add their perspective in a large group setting.

### → Large Group

Dedicating time for whole group conversation can also help build community and deepen the conversation, especially if people have time to share in partners or small groups beforehand. This could also be time for a "cool-down" with each person sharing a quick takeaway to wrap up the session.

## TAKING PRECAUTIONS

We ask whoever is facilitating the book club to take into account the reality that conversations about racism are *not* inherently anti-racist—particularly in heterogeneous groups where white people are the numerical majority. At the very least, please dedicate time during the first session to develop community norms and revisit them at the start of every session. We also ask that facilitators make decisions about when and where the book club is hosted in consideration of people's accessibility needs (e.g., child care, seating, sounds, scents, etc). Last, but not least, we ask that facilitators make plans for how to respond if hostile actors attempt to disrupt the book club in some way, especially if invitations have been extended to the general public.

## SESSION 1—WHY THIS BOOK?

To prepare for this session, review the norms below and read “Why This Book?”

### Suggested Norms for Talking About Race (adapted from Ijeoma Oluo and Jamie Jin Lewis)

- Listen to understand, not to respond.
- Lean into discomfort. The work of addressing injustice is sometimes uncomfortable, especially aspects we’ve never had to think about before. Trust that the reward will outweigh discomfort.
- Name race and racism. Avoid using coded or vague language. Use the words you know to talk about racism specifically.
- Flow in, flow out. Monitor how much space you’re taking up in a conversation. If you tend to be the first one to speak up, challenge yourself to listen to others first. If you usually hang back in a conversation, challenge yourself to speak your truth.
- Speak from the “I” perspective; avoid generalizations.
- What’s said here, stays here. What’s learned here, leaves here. This is a space to build trust and deepen relationships.
- Remember, this is not a debate or performance. We are talking about people’s lived experiences and real pain. Your goal should not be to win or score points.
- Remember that people of color are often speaking from a lifetime of painful experiences around race, and therefore their emotional response in the conversation may not be one that white people will fully understand. That doesn’t make those responses any less valid.
- Seek growth, not closure.

### Additional Resources:

Oluo, I. (2019). [\*So you want to talk about race?\*](#) Hachette UK.

Sensoy, Ö., & DiAngelo, R. (2014). [Respect differences? Challenging the common guidelines in social justice education](#). *Democracy and Education*, 22 (2), 1.

[Talking About Race](#) from the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

**WELCOME:** Introductions + What brings you joy?

### IN WHOLE GROUP, CO-CONSTRUCT COMMUNITY NORMS:

- What makes for a *healthy* conversation about race and racism? What helps conversations be anti-racist?
- Conversely, what makes for an *unhealthy* conversation about race and racism? What keeps conversations from being anti-racist?

NOTE: *Revisit these norms at the beginning of each session and edit them as needed.*

**IN PARTNERS:**

- What do you hope to get from this book, and how does that hope connect to your own ethnoracial background, community, and family?
- Whose legacies are you thinking about most as you begin this book?
- When you're confronting complex, even traumatic, realities about the world, how do you avoid despair? What sustains you in anti-racist work?

**IN SMALL/LARGE GROUP:**

- As the introduction explains, this book is a response to [HF 802](#) (legislation restricting what can be taught in public schools about racism and sexism in Iowa, among other things). What do you notice and wonder about the legislation?
- What do you think makes history education such a priority target of many elected officials in Iowa? Who / what benefits from this legislation?
- What do you know and wonder about HF 802 and how it is impacting K-12 and university students and educators in Iowa?

**WRAP-UP:** What does the title “(RE)PRESENT” mean to you right now?

## SESSION 2—MYTH 1: IOWA IS ALL WHITE PEOPLE

To prepare for this session, read Myth 1.

**WELCOME:** What BIPOC-led businesses, institutions, and organizations in Iowa do you want to shout out?

### IN PARTNERS:

- How did you and/or your family come to live in Iowa? Where would your family's story fit in this first chapter?
- If you've lived in Iowa a long time, what demographic changes have you witnessed and what responses have you noticed? If you've lived in Iowa a short time, what expectations did you have about the demographics of Iowa before you moved here and how have those ideas been challenged or reinforced?
- How has your ethnoracial identity impacted your life in Iowa? How has it influenced decisions about / experiences related to where you live, work, shop, go to school, etc.?

### IN SMALL/LARGE GROUP:

- What are the consequences of *not* knowing that information? What delusions, distortions, or different realities does it create?
- How have you witnessed / experienced the purposeful perpetuation of ignorance about the demographics of this community / Iowa? What media, images, etc. send those messages?
- What racial and ethnic diversity in Iowa was *not* included in this chapter? What stories and communities should we be sure to include in a second edition of the book?

**WRAP-UP:** What is the value of knowing about the demographics of our community and how / why those demographics exist and have changed over time?

## SESSION 3—MYTH 2: IOWA NICE PREVENTS RACISM

To prepare for this session, read Myth 2.

**WELCOME:** What word / phrase / idea is lingering with you from previous book club conversations?

### IN PARTNERS:

- What about your own upbringing did this chapter make you reflect on, especially in terms of the schools you attended and the neighborhoods you lived in?
- What have been your experiences with Iowa Nice?
- Which of the myth-busting suggestions resonated with you the most, and why? What lessons have *you* learned from your own anti-racism efforts?

### IN SMALL/LARGE GROUP:

- Where do you think the concept of “Iowa Nice” originates? What keeps it going?
- How does the reputation of “niceness” or models of “success” hinder anti-racism work in Iowa? Does it ever help?
- What is the relationship between Iowa Nice and the common telling of stories about racial equity and equality in Iowa’s history? What is needed for a more complex telling of these stories? What might the consequences be of a more complex telling of these stories?

**WRAP-UP:** Instead of “Iowa Nice,” what do you wish the state’s reputation was or think it should be?

## **SESSION 4—MYTH 3: FOLLOWING THE RULES PROTECTS PEOPLE FROM RACISM.**

**To prepare for this session, read Myth 3.**

**WELCOME:** Which story from this chapter did you find most interesting, and why?

### **IN PARTNERS:**

- Where in Iowa have you felt a sense of community, safety, and belonging? Where have you not? What accounts for these differences?
- What story from this chapter most made you reflect on which institutions and processes you trust and/or take for granted? Which are you (re)considering whether they are worthy of trust?
- What are your experiences with mutual aid? With interracial solidarity? How did they compare to other ways of being in community with people?

### **IN SMALL/LARGE GROUP:**

- How do you make sense of the tension between how the criminal justice system can be used both to advance and dismantle white supremacy?
- What current laws / rules in Iowa may appear to be racially neutral but actually reinforce white supremacy or amplify the impacts of racism?
- In an era when so many levels of government are opposed to anti-racism, what from this chapter gives you insights about what actions are most effective to protect communities of color and sustain anti-racist work? What can we learn from the past in our state to navigate current politics?

**WRAP-UP:** Is this book making you more or less hopeful about the future? *or* What prevailing emotion are you experiencing as you read this book?

## SESSION 5—WHAT NEXT?

To prepare for this session, read **What's Next?**

**WELCOME:** Who is someone you have talked about this book with? What made you want to tell them about what you were reading?

### **IN PARTNERS:**

- Which part of the book was most meaningful to you? Why?
- What communities and/or organizations in Iowa do you want to share this book with, and why?

### **IN SMALL/LARGE GROUP:**

- Critics of history education as explored/advocated for in this book call it “divisive.” What is your response?
- What kind of history education do you want in Iowa’s public schools and what will it take to make that happen? What role do you think this book could play in those efforts?
- What has reading this book inspired you to do? What’s next for *you*?

**WRAP-UP:** Now that you’ve read the whole book, what does the title “(RE)PRESENT” mean to you?