



# The Anti-Racist Cookbook

A Recipe Guide for Conversations About Race That Goes Beyond Covered Dishes and “Kum-Bah-Ya”

## 2020 Supplement on Police Brutality Toward Black People A Discussion Guide

### Introduction

The deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020 brought increased attention to police brutality toward Black people in the United States. Following widespread protests, local organizers, religious leaders, and social justice advocates sought to engage communities in conversations about policing disparities affecting the Black community that ranged from racial profiling to the killing of unarmed men and women.

Cross-race conversations about this topic will be unproductive unless those engaged in the discussions understand the differing viewpoints Black people and White people often have about the police. From an early age, White children generally are taught to see police as “community helpers,” officers who enforce the law fairly, who help defend against criminals, and who have a friendly attitude toward the “good,” law-abiding people they serve in their city, county, or state. Those early messages are reinforced into adulthood. First responders, including the “brave men and women in blue,” are repeatedly complimented for selflessness, bravery, and morality by politicians, reporters, and those they have well served.

Black people get the same messages. But they also get a competing messages from a centuries-long history of discriminatory policing. Any fruitful cross-race conversation must use that history as a primary focus. We offer a brief historical perspective below.

### Policing Black People in America

From the outset, Black people were conceived as inferior. Slave codes defined slaves as property, not as human beings. Like farm animals, they had no rights.

To keep the enslaved population from rebelling, Southern states organized *slave patrols* to protect the interest of White slave owners. Members of slave patrols worked at night by riding between plantations, stopping Black people, searching their homes, and beating any enslaved people who were found without written passes. Slave patrols were the first step toward modern policing in the United States, and their primary duty was the policing of enslaved and free Blacks.

The end of slavery brought an end to slave patrols, but large police departments had been developing in major U.S. cities beginning in the 1830s. Those large departments were used to control the increasing European immigrant population and protect the interests of wealthy White businessmen. Black people were viewed by society, in general, and by police, specifically, as second class at best. Here is an incomplete list of policies, laws, and customs that make the point:

Jim Crow Laws	Segregation Laws and Customs
Separate-But-Equal Laws	Lynching
Overly-Punitive Drug Laws	Racial Profiling
Implicit Bias	Redlining
Restrictive Racial Covenants	Racial Job Discrimination

Amidst a history that began with the mistreatment of enslaved Africans in Virginia starting in 1619 to capturing a 2020 cell phone video of police officers perched on George Floyd—one with a knee on his neck—as he pleaded for his life and expired, Black people in the United States know both how the police can be helpful, and how they can be oppressive.

To begin any conversation about Black people and policing, it is imperative to keep in mind this history. Without it, our conversations will not be transformative, but too often focus on the narrow argument that individual police officers are good people. Whatever is meant by *good people*, we suggest that the assertion misses the point. A transformative conversation *must* be enriched with the often negative experiences of Black people with police. If those voices can be heard—really heard, through all their disappointment, anger, fear, and resilience—then the dialogue that we aim for in the *Anti-Racist Cookbook* can change attitudes for the better. That is our hope.

### **Preparation and Cautions**

Talking about race is a challenge. Talking about race, policing, and the Black community can be daunting. We strongly suggest that conversations about race should *not* begin with the topic of policing we provide in this Supplement, but with some of the other topics discussed in the [Anti-Racist Cookbook](#). We sincerely believe that successful conversations about race require an understanding of early messages about race, racial privilege, and other foundational topics that the [Anti-Racist Cookbook](#) provides. Please build your discussion on those foundations.

While the topic of policing the Black community is vital, hastily crafted conversations will founder if participants have not established a shared vocabulary about race, or have not first explored how race has affected their lives in general. Black people often have been deeply wounded by their police interactions and the sometimes brutal policing of their ancestors. Having a successful conversation on the topic requires the patience to build trust by first talking about less traumatic racial experiences. The *Cookbook* provides pertinent questions in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 that you should use *before* you delve into the topic of policing.<sup>1</sup> We suggest you hold one or two conversations to build your discussion on some of these questions before you hold conversation about police brutality.

We also recommend that facilitators and participants do some background reading about the history of policing Black people in the United States. Two articles we recommend are [Black Bodies on the Ground: Policing Disparities in the African American Community—An Analysis of Newsprint From January 1, 2015, Through December 31, 2015](#) by Michael A. Robinson and [The Racist Roots of American Policing: From Slave Patrols to Traffic Stops](#) by Connie Hassert-Walker.

As we write this Supplement in late August 2020, we are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevents face-to-face conversations contemplated in the *Anti-Racist Cookbook*. Nevertheless, virtual conversations on platforms like GoToMeeting and Zoom can be successful. Please consult the 2020 Supplement on Video Conference Discussions About Race, which is available on our website.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the *Discussion Tips* section on the next page regarding the level of experience needed to facilitate the *Questions for Discussion* in this Supplement.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What is your personal experience with the police? How were your ancestors treated by the police (if you know)? How has race affected both your personal and ancestral experiences?
2. For White people: How are you affected by what you have heard from People of Color about their personal and ancestral experiences with the police?

For People of Color: How are you affected by what you have heard from White people about their personal and ancestral experiences with the police?

3. What should our society do to address police brutality against Black people? Does seeing racism as the root cause of such brutality enrich our understanding of the problem?
4. What responsibility do individuals have to address police brutality against Black people? Is the responsibility different for People of Color and White people?
5. For groups that want to organize: What action can we take in our community to address police brutality against Black people?

## Discussion Tips

1. The questions offered in this supplement are meant to be in addition to those in *The Anti-Racist Cookbook*. Starting with some of the questions in the *Cookbook* will enrich the discussion of those in this supplement.
2. The questions about personal and ancestral experiences with the police may engender feelings of sadness, despair, and anger in some participants. Hence, only people who have well-developed skills in facilitating discussions on race and who are comfortable with helping participants cope with strong emotions should undertake those questions. Using a team of two facilitators is also a good idea, especially if the facilitators have different racial backgrounds.

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• **We wish you the best of luck** •  
• **in your discussions.** •  
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• **Let us know about your discussions** •  
• **by sending us an email to** •  
• **info@beyonddiversity.org** •  
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• **—The Authors** •  
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