



FRONT PAGE DIALOGUE: RACE AND POLICING

In the United States, the deaths of black men and boys including Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, and Freddie Gray, among others, at the hands of police officers have led to a groundswell of demonstrations and debate on race, policing, and public protest. These deaths illuminate longstanding issues of racial profiling and systemic violence while highlighting the shortcomings of the criminal justice system.

Public reaction to these events has demonstrated that productive framing and spaces for discussions across lines of race, class, and social status are exceedingly rare. Sites of Conscience have an important role to play in facilitating constructive conversations on these critical issues. Below is one model for engaging visitors in dialogue on race and policing. We encourage you to adapt and ground the dialogue in the unique history that your Site of Conscience works to preserve and share.

How to use Front Page Dialogues

Rather than using all the model questions suggested under each phase, facilitators may select questions that reflect the evolving conversation of the group they are guiding in dialogue. Some questions may be useful for multiple topics; we mark these with slashes (ex. race/policing/protest). Finally, we are always available to work with you as you develop your dialogue session. If you are not familiar with the Arc of Dialogue model, you can contact Sarah Pharaon (sparaon@sitesofconscience.org) or Braden Paynter (bpaynter@sitesofconscience.org) for support and more information.

Guidelines

What are the group agreements or guidelines for the dialogue that help us establish the “container” that the dialogue occurs within? Here are some sample agreements:

1. Use “I” statements. Speak only for yourself.
2. Share the air: leave room for everyone to speak.
3. Our unique backgrounds and social status give us different life experiences.
4. Be willing to examine your own assumptions.

Preparation

Print large copies of the following quotes and tape them to the walls of the dialogue space. Position chairs in a circle.

- When it is convenient to award qualitative value to murder, we do so. When it isn't, we do not. We are outraged by violence done to police, because it is violence done to all of us as a society. In the same measure, we look away from violence done by the police, because the police are not the true agents of the violence. We are. -Ta-Nehisi Coates, [Blue Lives Matter](#), The Atlantic
- The grand jury decision convinced some people that peaceful protests don't necessarily bring justice for black people. You didn't just see buildings burning last night, you saw democracy on fire ... we had peaceful protests for 108 days and the police didn't respond to that. -Rev. Osagyefo Sekou speaking about Ferguson, [quoted in USA Today](#)



- Phobias are extreme aversions embedded deep in our psyches, activated when we come face-to-face with the thing we fear. Some people are afraid of black people. -Brandon Hill, [Negrophobia](#), Time Magazine
- To the people of Baltimore and the demonstrators across America: I heard your call for 'No justice, no peace.' Your peace is sincerely needed as I work to deliver justice on behalf of this young man. -Baltimore State's Attorney [Marilyn Mosby](#)
- It is a common myth that police officers approach conflicts with a feeling of power — after all, they are armed, they represent the state, they are specially trained and backed by an 'army.' In reality, an officer's gun is almost always a liability ... because a suspect may grab it in a scuffle. (cont.) Officers are usually at a disadvantage because they have to intervene in unfamiliar terrain, on someone else's territory. They worry that bystanders might become involved, either by helping somebody the officer has to confront or, after the fact, by second-guessing an officer's conduct." -George Kelling, [Police Accountability- A Better Way](#), City Journal
- But it is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard.-Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., [The Other America](#)
- In the US, the racial hierarchy is mapped with white people at one end and black people at the other, with the rest of us people of color between. How we are positioned within greatly determines our experiences. When I was growing up, I got the message that "those Asians can be smart and they don't rock the boat. Why can't those other black or brown folks be like them?" Historically, we've been used as a wedge, to divide people of color, especially working class people of color, who otherwise have a lot in common. -Christine Cordero, [Practicing #Asians4BlackLives Solidarity: 5 Lessons from #shutdownOPD](#), The Race Files
- We must speak the truth about our shortcomings as law enforcement, and fight to be better. But as a country, we must also speak the truth to ourselves. Law enforcement is not the root cause of problems in our hardest hit neighborhoods. Police officers—people of enormous courage and integrity, in the main—are in those neighborhoods, risking their lives, to protect folks from offenders who are the product of problems that will not be solved by body cameras.-FBI Director [James Comey](#)



PHASE I - COMMUNITY BUILDING

Questions in Phase 1 help build the “learning community” and break down artificial barriers between people by allowing participants to share information about themselves.

Where do you see the police in your daily life?

What was your initial response when you heard about Ferguson?

Who is a change maker you respect?

Take out your phone and find an image that speaks to you about race in America.

PHASE II - SHARING OUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Questions in Phase 2 help participants recognize how their experiences are alike and different and why.

How does where you are from influence the way you think about race/policing/protest?

What was your first experience or awareness of the system of policing?

Share a story of a protest you were a part of or witnessed.

How have the protests and different responses affected your thinking about race/policing/protest?

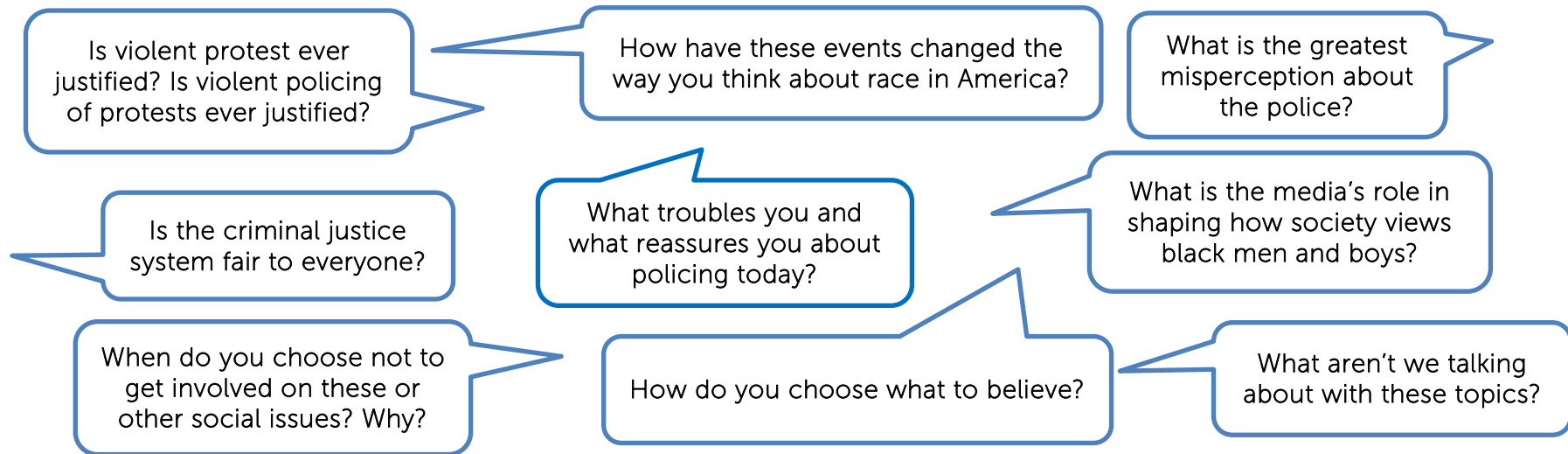
Describe a time you were accused of something you did not do?

To Do: Before starting Phase III, allow people to read the posted quotes in silence. Invite participants to stand next to the quote they are interested in talking more about. Give these small groups several minutes to discuss why they chose their quote before coming back to the larger group



PHASE III - EXPLORING BEYOND OURSELVES

Questions in Phase 3 help participants engage in inquiry and exploration about the dialogue topic in an effort to learn with and from one another.



PHASE IV - SYNTHESIZING THE EXPERIENCE

Questions in Phase 4 help the group to reflect on the dialogue and what they learned.

