



Digital Front Page Dialogue

Race and Policing

Between July 2014 and April 2015, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray and Walter Scott - all African American men - lost their lives at the hands of United States law enforcement, launching a national conversation on the disproportionate and inhumane abuses men and women of color in America endure. In response, the Coalition released a Front Page Dialogue on Race and Policing in 2015 to assist Sites of Conscience in leading community dialogues on longstanding issues related to racial profiling, systemic violence and the criminal justice system.

Five years later, the need for these discussions is even more urgent. In light of the global outpouring of grief over the recent deaths of African Americans in police custody, including George Floyd, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks, the United States is once again reckoning with its brutal and inexcusable history of white supremacy and racial violence. After similar protests against police brutality broke out in 2015, *The Washington Post* began recording the number of people shot and killed by police – a number that had tellingly never been officially tracked. “By the end of 2015,” they noted in an article on June 8, 2020, “officers had fatally shot nearly 1,000 people, twice as many as ever documented in one year by the federal government.” The article added that police had killed nearly the same number every year since, for a total of 5,400 people, and that although overall rates for unarmed shootings have decreased since 2015, African Americans, both armed and unarmed, are killed by police at a higher rate than white people.¹

As members of a global network of more than 300 historic sites, museums and memory initiatives in 65 countries, Sites of Conscience can support their communities at this time by facilitating constructive conversation on this ongoing crisis, addressing a range of topics related to race, whiteness, policing, slavery, allyship, justice movements, and many others. Below is our updated model for engaging staff and visitors in dialogue on race and policing which we encourage you to adapt and ground 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 the dialogue. We also anticipate that you will develop new questions ahead of time or during the dialogue to draw on the strengths of your particular site, organization or community, or to respond to the needs of participants. If you are not familiar with the Arc of Dialogue model, you can contact Braden Paynter (bpaynter@sitesofconscience.org) for support and more information.

This particular dialogue is intended to be facilitated digitally. While digital spaces often compel us to move quickly, these conversations take time, just as they would in person. Take the time you need to build trust and a sense of community early in the dialogue. Video, preferably where everyone can see others simultaneously, is suggested for digital dialogues.

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.
2. Leave room for everyone to speak.
3. Engage with care.

1. https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/protests-spread-over-police-shootings-police-promised-reforms-every-year-they-still-shoot-nearly-1000-people/2020/06/08/5c204f0c-a67c-11ea-b473-04905b1af82b_story.html

SHARED CONTENT

To facilitate this dialogue, one or more of the following articles should be sent to participants ahead of time to create a shared basis from which to begin their conversations

The Atlantic, "The American Nightmare," IbramX.Kendi, June 1, 2020
<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/american-nightmare/612457/>

Black Lives Matter, "Healing in Action: A Toolkit for Black Lives Matter, Healing Justice and Direct Action"
https://blacklivesmatter.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/BLM_HealingAction_r1.pdf

Human Rights Watch, "Brazil Suffers Its Own Scourge of Police Brutality," June 3, 2020
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/03/brazil-suffers-its-own-scourge-police-brutality>

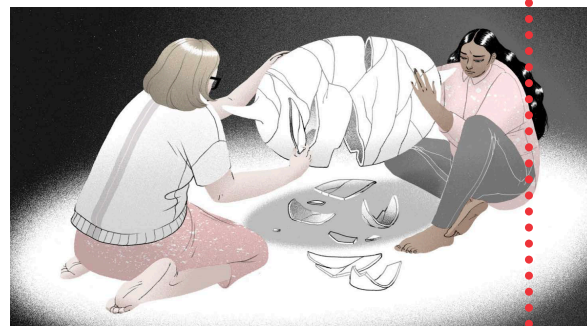
National Public Radio, "Microaggressions Are a Big Deal: How to Talk Them Out and When to Walk Away," June 9, 2020
https://www.npr.org/2020/06/08/872371063/microaggressions-are-a-big-deal-how-to-talk-them-out-and-when-to-walk-away?utm_source=instagram.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=20200610

The New York Times, "How Public Opinion Has Moved on Black Lives Matter," June 10, 2020
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/10/upshot/black-lives-matter-attitudes.html>

Time Magazine, "How American Power Dynamics Have Shaped Perceptions of Looting, From the Boston Tea Party to Today," June 23, 2020
<https://time.com/5851111/protests-looting/>

The Washington Post, "Some Officers March and Kneel with Protesters, Creating Dissonant Images on Fraught Weekend of Uprising," June 1, 2020
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/06/01/some-officers-march-kneel-with-protesters-creating-dissonant-images-fraught-weekend-uprisings/>

USA Today, "Ferguson Struggles to Grasp Why Protests Turned Violent," December 1, 2014
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/12/01/ferguson-struggles-to-understand-move-to-violence/70120308/>





PHASE I - COMMUNITY BUILDING

Questions in Phase I help build the “learning community” by allowing participants to share information about themselves.

Facilitators should welcome the group, introduce themselves, explain their role and the purpose of the dialogue. Facilitators should also ask for agreement on the guidelines established for the group. Community building, agreeing to guidelines, and taking time to get to know one another are as important if not more important in digital versus in-person dialogues. Facilitators should take care not to rush through these early questions, but give participants plenty of time to get to know and trust each other.

Where do you see the police in your daily life?

How did you hear about the death of George Floyd and what was your initial response?

Who is a changemaker 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 II help participants recognize how their experiences are alike and different and why. Having a shared experience or engagement with content is helpful for deepening conversation. For this Phase it can be particularly helpful to have everyone read one or several of the articles shared above ahead of time.

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

What and who do you rely on for information?

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

How do you think about this topic differently than in 2015?

Share a story of when you felt disempowered or frightened by an authority figure.

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

How have you been pushed to think differently by these events?

Do you feel hopeful or hopeless that the system can change?

What feels similar and what feels different about these versus past events?

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

How have you and those around you balanced the needs of responding to Mr. Floyd's killing with the threat of the pandemic?

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



PHASE III - EXPLORING BEYOND OURSELVES

Questions in Phase III help participants engage in inquiry and exploration about the dialogue topic in an effort to learn with and from one another. Phase III can present a challenge in digital conversations. Being able to see people and engaging in early trust-building increases our chances of being able to engage here productively, continuing to learn from each other and about ourselves.

Is violent protest ever justified? Is violent policing of protests ever justified?

How have these events changed the way you think about race in America?

What is the media's role in shaping how society views African American adults and children?

With the calls for reform and abolition of the US system of policing, what has resonated with you and what has felt problematic?

When do you choose not to get involved on these or other social issues? Why?

What is the greatest misperception about the police?

What aren't we talking about with these topics?

What troubles you and what reassures you about policing today?

How do you choose what to believe?

PHASE IV - SYNTHESIZING THE EXPERIENCE

Questions in Phase IV help the group to reflect on the dialogue and what they learned. Phase IV is crucial in all dialogues, but particularly when people feel overwhelmed or powerless. This is where dialogue turns our reflection and learning into future action. Even if the group did not fully explore Phase III due to the digital nature of the dialogue, facilitators should still encourage Phase IV.

What values must guide our justice system?

If we could continue this conversation, what would you want to discuss?

What will you do differently?

Who do you want to continue this conversation with? Why?

What is one step we can make towards racial equity in America?

How can we get more people engaged on these issues?

What are some ways for us to resolve these issues?

How do we build, safe and just communities?