

***Waking Up White* by Debby Irving**

Discussion Guide

Childhood in White

“From a young age I internalized the idea that accomplishment for anyone was simply a matter of intention and hard work.” pg. 10

- Thinking back, did your family ever talk about issues of race and class? If so, what was the content of those discussions?
- As a child, what was your understanding of why some people were wealthy and some people were not? What was your family’s attitude about people in power?
- How did your faith fit into discussions about wealth, race and power?

Midlife Wake-Up Calls

“Not thinking I had a race, the idea of asking me to study my ‘racial identity’ felt ludicrous.” pg. 30

- What are the ways in which you describe yourself to others? By gender? Religion? Marital status? Familial status (parent, sibling, grandparent, etc.)? Is race ever a part of that description?
- Is it important for white people to perceive and understand whiteness?
- What “aha” or “waking up” moments did you have while reading this section of the book? If you did not have a moment like this while reading the book, do you remember having a “waking up” moment about race previously? What was it? How did it occur?

Why Didn’t I Wake Up Sooner?

“Privilege is a strange thing in that you notice it least when you have it most.” pg. 71

- What privileges are granted simply for being white?
- Have you ever had anyone doubt or minimize an experience of racism or sexism? How did that make you feel?
- Have you ever second-guessed another person’s experience when it comes to racism or some other form of discrimination?

Rethinking Key Concepts

“How was it possible that I was both a ‘good person’ and utterly clueless?” pg. 95

- How do good people help to perpetuate systemic racism?
- How does “colorblindness” help to perpetuate systemic racism?
- What is the Robin Hood syndrome and how does it affect people?

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Twenty-Five Years of Tossing and Turning

“White people becoming racially aware and coaching other white people to do the same is so important.” pg. 125

- When do you feel inside or outside of social circles? How does your race affect how “included” you feel in different settings?
- What do these chapters suggest, if anything, about the generational effects of racism?
- Why is it important for white people to take on this responsibility for their racial awareness?

Leaving My Comfort Zone

“Recently I asked my husband the simple question, ‘Did you empty the dishwasher yet?’ My intention was to find out if my favorite coffee cup was clean. Bruce, however, felt as if I were monitoring him. Regardless of my intent, the impact was that he felt nagged. The way I meant it, and the way he heard it, were miles apart.” pg. 159

- Do you agree with the guidelines Ms. Irving describes for conversations on page 172? In your opinion, are any guidelines missing?
- How can white people prepare to listen, without judgment, to the experiences of people with color? Why is it important for them to do so?

Inner Work

“Today’s work to dismantle racism begins in the personal realm. Until I began to examine how racism had shaped me, I had little to contribute to the movement of righting racial wrongs.” pg. 192

- List some of the ways in which America’s dominant culture has impacted who you are and what you do, or don’t do.

Outer Work

“Either I’m intentionally and strategically working against [racism] or I’m aiding and abetting the system.” pg. 219

- Do you agree with the above statement? Why or why not?

Reclaiming My Humanity

“By being taught to buck up and compete in a world of individual players, I learned to silence feelings of vulnerability, curiosity, and compassion. As those parts of me withered, the void filled with assumption and judgment.” pg. 245

- What qualities make a good ally? What behaviors or attitudes can compromise allyship?

Sources: Religious Action Center, PCUSA, and Jodi Picoult