

A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota Reading Guide

1. Why do you think that *now* is an especially good time for the truth about race in Minnesota? What kinds of truths about race do you think have been previously suppressed?
2. These sixteen essays are personal, and the authors make themselves vulnerable through these intimacies. How did you find yourself responding emotionally to the authors as you listened, contemplated, and empathized with them? What personal experiences of your own could you connect or compare to those in the essays?
3. Each author has their own tone or attitude toward the how systemic racism affects them on a daily basis and in terms of their life cycle. The essays use a diversity of writing styles and literary elements—prose, memoir, poetry, quotes, dialogue. The rhetorical stances of the authors toward their audience vary, as well. How effective were these authorial choices in persuading you to empathize with the writers?
4. An anthology (which literally means “flower collecting,” from *anthos*, flower, plus *logia*, collecting) creates a community within the bounds of a book. The theme of community recurs throughout the collection; many contributors address why they choose to live or remain in Minnesota. How do you see the motif of “home” presenting itself throughout the anthology, and do any passages call to you especially powerfully?
5. How is the concept of whiteness explored throughout the collection? What does whiteness mean to you? What is your first memory of race and how have your ideas about whiteness changed, or not, throughout your life? What is your current orientation toward whiteness?
6. Prior to reading this book, how deeply had you experienced or considered the diversity among native people and people of color, often referred to by the mass media as “non- white.” How has reading these essays complicated, affirmed, or opened up your perceptions of racial diversity?
7. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality has come to the forefront of the social movements for racial justice in America. How did you see the authors addressing race within complicated contexts of gender, class, geography, migration and immigration, religion, etc.? What are intersections in your own life and identity? How do they operate? Which parts of your overall identity and social location afford you privilege and which parts render you or parts of yourself marginalized, problematized?
8. Essays side-by-side naturally invite readers to compare and contrast, to evaluate and prefer. The seriousness and urgency of ongoing racial injustice should compel us to consider work *between* the essays. How are they in conversation with each other? How can you think critically about them (their overlaps, their divergences, their provocations and invitations), draw your own conclusions or calls to action that may not already be in the essays, in order to take concrete steps to end racism?
9. Immigrants, children of immigrants, and those whose family members have lived here longer have different experiences. Select an essay written by someone with membership in each category and discuss how their perspectives differ. How does reading these in one collection help you think about how race operates in similar and different ways depending on one’s status?
10. American Indian people have experienced attempted genocide, warfare, dispossession, and racism. How do the two Indigenous essayists in this book, Heid Erdrich and Diane Wilson, reflect this history? Does the difference between these essays surprise you? Why?

11. Transracial adoption and interracial marriage can bring these large societal questions into the most intimate setting—the family. Pick two essays that address this question and contrast the writers’ ways of responding to these ways of living with racial difference in a place in which whiteness is centered, normalized, and privileged.
12. How does this book shift your paradigm of Minnesota history? What does it make you curious about? What other narratives in and of Minnesota should be amplified to help see, name, analyze, and dismantle racism?
13. Minnesota and the nation are changing. Whites will soon no longer be the majority of the population in the United States. How do these essays prompt you to think about this new future? What racial justice problems and goals were not addressed in the book?
14. Climate change has and will create more displaced people on the planet, many from poorer countries from the global south and east. These will largely be people of color. What can we learn from these essays that may help us build racial justice into the movement to find safe homes for this climate-related diaspora?
15. If you were to write your own essay responding to the same issues as those in this book, what would it be about? With whom would you want to share it? How do you think the writing process might change you?
16. What do the essayists in this anthology offer in terms of thinking about liberation for all? How are whites confined and diminished by racism and segregation? How might white people benefit morally, spiritually, socially, and economically by the abolition of institutional racism? How will the abolition of racism create more safety, more environmental sustainability, more freedom, more interconnectedness for everybody?
17. Taking no action in an oppressive system is not a neutral position, but one that is complicit with the existing order. In order to move toward greater justice, people must organize into social movements, and work persistently, strategically, and creatively on campaigns aimed at tangible results. What is one new action you can commit to, now that you’ve been inspired by witnessing the truths expressed by these bold and generous writers?

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