



**Let's
talk
about**

RACE

PHOTOGRAPH BY
CJ Burton

It's the elephant, it's in the room, and it's time.



You're a white woman standing with a black colleague, about to hail a cab. She half laughs and says, "You do it—that way, they'll stop." You grope for the right thing to say. You have no idea what that might be.

Your son's preschool teacher calls you Bianca by mistake. She's confused you with the other Latina mom in the class. "I'm going to have to give you two name tags!" she says.

Someone asks you whether all Chinese people are good at math. You don't know. You are Korean.

Your smiling white neighbor says, "I don't see →

color! Doesn't matter to me whether you're blue, purple, or green!" Since such people don't exist, you're not quite sure what point she's making.

If you're living in America in 2017, chances are you've endured some version of these scenarios—and when you did, you stayed silent. You saved your shame, frustration, or corrosive rage for later, to be shared with someone who also shares your skin color, who will understand. If you spoke up, you might look overly sensitive. Or angry. Or clueless.

But lately, it seems that the topic of race, always simmering in our national consciousness, has moved squarely to the front burner. In coffee shops and on Twitter feeds, we're talking about border walls, travel bans, and movies where black guys are body-snatched by scary white liberals. We're debating whether the Hollywood playing field will ever be level for creatives of color, whether athletes are heroes or traitors for sitting out the national anthem. We're watching yet another iPhone video of brutality trying to disguise itself as justice. People of every color are looking at each other as if to say, "What now?"

Yes, what now? Eleanor Roosevelt had an idea. Pondering another communication breakdown altogether (this one with Khrushchev), she could have been channeling our current dilemma when she said, in 1960, "We have to face the fact that either all of us are going to die together or we are going to learn to live together. And if we are to live together, we will have to talk."

So let's talk about race. Let's talk about the times it's been an issue—in our childhoods and at our dinner tables, in our classrooms and boardrooms, in intimate moments and in the dark corners of our minds. Let's talk about the things we don't understand but really, truly want to. Let's talk about the systemic racism embedded in our country's laws and institutions, and let's also talk about the small but significant things any single person can do to narrow the gap between herself and another.

At this moment in our history, one truth is self-evident: We can't afford to say race is just a black thing, or a Hispanic thing, or an Asian thing, or a #StayWoke thing. It's a human thing. And no human anything ever benefited from people keeping their mouths shut.

Walking the Walk

On meaning well vs. doing well.

BY HAIG CHAHINIAN

When my husband and I adopted our newborn biracial daughter, I proudly snapped photos of her and pasted them to handwritten announcements I sent everyone we knew. I instantly loved this child. I vowed to carve out a world for her that was free of bigotry, including bigotry against gay men like her two dads. Her picture books showed people of every shade. We moved to Harlem so she could see tykes like herself on the playground. As she's grown—she's 11 now—I always thought I was succeeding.

But there was that bright, bracing autumn day two years ago, when she and I went on a hike in the Hudson Valley. Wet leaves plastered the ground, a breeze chilled our ears, and my daughter pushed her mocha-skinned Bitty Twin doll in a stroller, straggling several yards behind me as I ascended the trail. And then I rounded a bend and saw a tall black man walking toward me.

I froze. The back of my neck tensed. Adrenaline shot through my limbs. I registered that he was moving quickly. Separated from my daughter, my instinct was to protect her, to call out to her. But what would I call? "Careful, here comes someone else enjoying the scent of pine needles!"?

By the time my girl and the oncoming hiker reached me—simultaneously—my panic had subsided. He smiled at us as he passed, using both hands to wave hello, as if he were in a parade. Embarrassed, I greeted him with a nod.

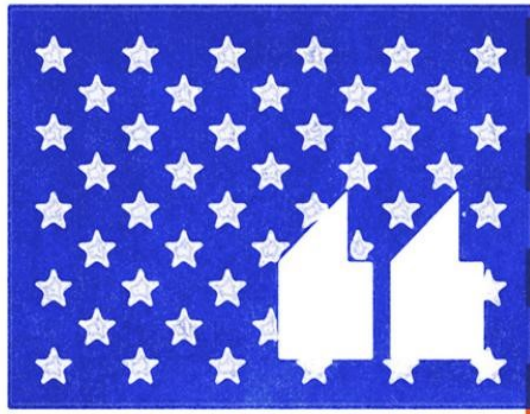
During my childhood, my

Armenian parents cursed the Ottomans of the Turkish empire that murdered all eight of my great-grandparents because of their ethnicity. Yet I was forbidden to play inside the home of our African American neighbors. My folks saw no link between their intolerance and the Turks' ethnic cleansing.

Now, ambling with my daughter, I was overcome with shame. I hated that seeing a dark-skinned man had frightened me so easily, especially since my own child had a similar complexion. I'd felt the same split-second impulse as the men who shot Alton Sterling and Tamir Rice—one similar to "gay panic," the urge to harm a queer person like me after perceiving a threat. And then I remembered: When the backpacker said hello, he'd raised his palms on either side of his head, as if to show he was unarmed. It looked like surrender—to me, his progressive, gay, urbanite aggressor.

When we adopted our daughter, I worried I wasn't prepared for the challenges of raising a child of color. Still, we took comfort in the fact that we were enlightened, that we knew better—that we *were* better. Hell, I'd even studied racial identity in college. But none of that had inoculated me against racist hair-trigger fear.

My daughter and I paused to catch our breath under a canopy of maple leaves. I reached into my knapsack and handed her a bag of dried fruit and nuts. She put a cranberry to the lips of her doll, then munched on it herself. Breathing in the mountain air, I recalled a saying that likened racism to smog: Although sometimes hard to see, it's everywhere. It's my job to both recognize its presence and fight against it—day by day, step by step.

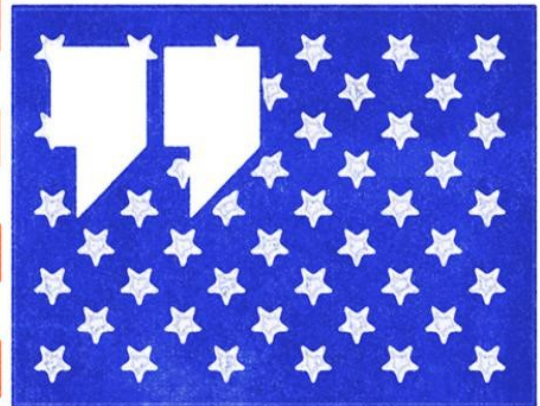


I AM *an*

AMERICAN,

NOT *an* **ASIAN-AMERICAN.**

My rejection of hyphenation has
been called race treachery, but it is
really a demand that America
deliver the promises
of its dream to all
its citizens equally.



— BHARATI MUKHERJEE

FAKE I.D.

On labels and their limits.
BY STEPHANIE JIMENEZ

Growing up, I was always called Spanish. At my Queens, New York, middle school, that's what the popular girls called themselves. But they watched telenovelas on Univision and knew words to songs I'd never heard. I was raised speaking English, and my Costa Rican dad introduced me to disco, not merengue.

I was scared of the popular girls: If being Spanish meant dancing bachata or speaking the language perfectly, I knew I didn't even come close. Still, I played the tongue-clicking diva, sprinkling my speech with *diques* and *peros* and *como asis* while raising a perfectly tweezed eyebrow.

College inspired my political awakening—and I hung out with the community-minded sociology majors from the Office of Diversity. It was a relief to have friends of color on a campus where my blonde classmates had last names like Nordstrom. But even in the Office of Diversity, I didn't quite belong. Mexican food all seemed mushy to me, and I was constantly being schooled on our community's heroes, always sweating which Chavez (Hugo? Cesar?) was the good one. I still couldn't speak much Spanish.

Today I work in marketing. And I'm forever being asked to offer my Latina perspective: Is this something *they'd* like? But I don't know who "they" are. The girls I emulated in middle school? The sociology majors I organized alongside in college? I'm neither *chicana*, *dominicana*, *cubana*, *peruana*, or *boricua*, but I'm expected to speak for them all. So even though it makes me feel like an impostor, I do. Otherwise, my white coworkers will.

REALITY CHECK

FILL IN THE BLANK...

I have _____ friends of an ethnicity different from my own.

I know _____ of those friends so well, I regularly invite them to **my home**.

When I walk through my neighborhood, _____ percent of the people I see are of an ethnicity different from mine.

About _____ percent of the people on my Facebook or Instagram feed are of an ethnicity different from mine.

⇒ **MY COWORKERS INCLUDE** ⇐

_____ **WHITE** _____ **BLACK** _____ **HISPANIC**
_____ **Asian** _____ **American Indian**
_____ **MIDDLE EASTERN PEOPLE.**

Of the TV shows I regularly watch, _____ star a nonwhite actor or actress.

At my **favorite restaurant**, I'm likely to see about _____ people of an ethnicity different from my own.

Of the last ten books I read, _____ were by nonwhite authors; _____ were by white authors.

The last time I had a meaningful conversation about politics, the other person's ethnicity was _____.

THIS PAGE: "FILL IN THE BLANK"; ADAPTED FROM A COMPENDIUM ON RACE, SY PARTNERS, 2014, PAGE 139; WARDROBE STYLIST: STEPHANIE TRICOLA. HAIR: DEYCKE HEIDORN USING KERASTASE AT FACTORY DOWNTOWN. MAKEUP: KEIKO HIRAMOTO USING CHANEL MAKEUP. PAGE 140: PROP: STYLIST: JARED LAWTON. WARDROBE STYLIST: STEPHANIE TRICOLA. HAIR: MARK ANTHONY FOR EXCLUSIVE ARTISTS USING PHYTO PARIS. MAKEUP: HIROSHI YONEMOTO. LOCATION: SPA NIOBE. PAGE 141: PRASHAD. "TOLERANCE ARABIA." COLORLINES, 2002.

**MOMENTS
OF TRUTH**

**Maria Al-sadek,
25, New York**

"I wore a hijab on my first day of high school in Mobile, Alabama, and spent the day being battered by questions. I remember looking at myself in the bathroom mirror, thinking, *It's just a simple piece of cloth; I'm the same person. So why do I feel so alienated?*"



**Lacey Caldwell Senko,
40, Cary, North
Carolina**

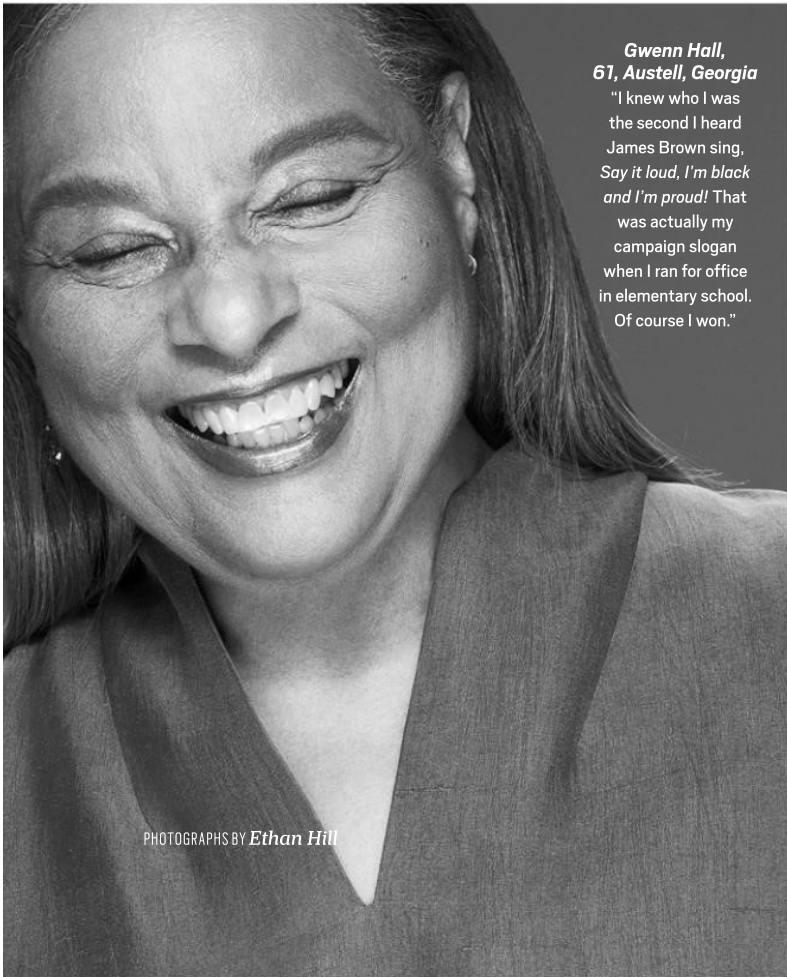
"When we were 17, my African American best friend and I went to a roller rink where I was the only white person; the other skaters glared and even pushed us. I asked, 'Is this how you feel every day?' When she said yes, it was an epiphany."



**Gwenn Hall,
61, Austell, Georgia**

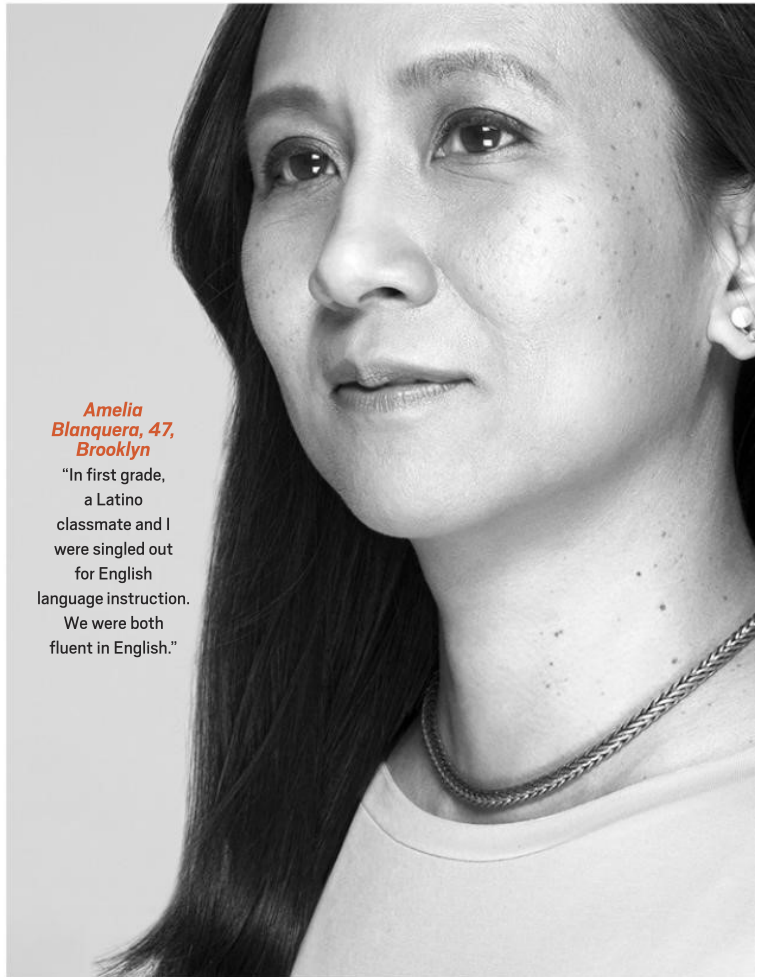
"I knew who I was the second I heard James Brown sing, *Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud!* That was actually my campaign slogan when I ran for office in elementary school. Of course I won."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Ethan Hill*



**Amelia
Blanquera, 47,
Brooklyn**

"In first grade, a Latino classmate and I were singled out for English language instruction. We were both fluent in English."





PHOTOGRAPH BY Chris Buck

Awkward Questions from Well-Intentioned People

It's okay to wonder, and *O* readers do....

For answers, go to oprah.com/awkwardQs

"Why do white people tan to change their color?"



"Why do some Indian people agree to arranged marriages?"



DREAD RECKONING

On the fear that comes with mothering a black son.

BY JESMYN WARD

When I discovered I was pregnant with my second child, I was cautiously excited. I knew that at my age, 39, I had a higher risk of complications, so through the early weeks I tried to avoid thinking of the embryo inside me as an actual child who would be entering my life. But when I had the standard screenings for genetic abnormalities, the technician told me one of the tests would reveal the gender, too. I said yes, I wanted to know. To be prepared.

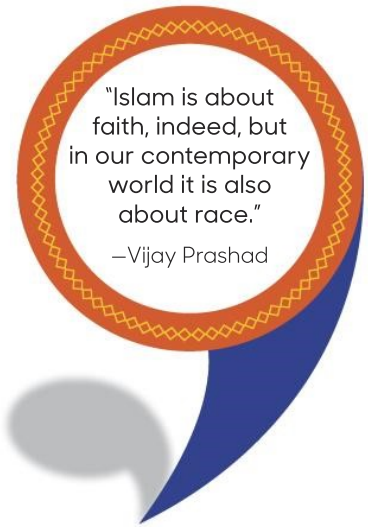
A week later, the nurse called. "It's a boy." Dread was a hot flush in my head that drained and pooled in my chest, made my heart churn and my hands shake. A boy. Some mothers would be overjoyed. I was terrified.

My first child is a girl. I know black girls and women die in America with disturbing frequency. But Trayvon Martin's face haunts me still, five years after his murder. I think I've known Emmett Till's shy smile my whole life. As a child, I dreamed about his soft body, beaten bloody. What would become of the black boy I would bear into this world?

Thirteen months later, my son sleeps fat-cheeked and round-bellied in his bassinet. Dread and fear are not like a heavy load, which can be carried or not; they're not like animals, which can follow you or not. My dread and fear at having a black boy child in America are like bones, dense and marrow-filled at my center, weighing me down. They are like organs, pulsing in my gut.

But my son, with his dimples and delicate ears, inspires tremulous

hope, too. In hope lies such strength, and also such weakness, bound as it is with constant terror. All of this coalesced in one feeling at the end of that phone call, and that feeling glows every time I look at my beautiful little boy. Love. I am his mother, and that means this: As a parent, I let him know he is precious. As a writer, I tell his stories. As a citizen, I strive for a world that will not strike him down in violence, but will grant him safety and grace and life.



"Islam is about faith, indeed, but in our contemporary world it is also about race."

—Vijay Prashad

They're Looking at You, Kid

On biracial sperm shopping.

BY NINA McCONIGLEY

I'm half Indian, half Irish, and I live in Wyoming, one of the country's least diverse states, where BLM stands for Bureau of Land Management, not Black Lives Matter. Many of my interactions start with a misunderstanding: people asking what tribe I am. "Oh, I'm dot-not-feather Indian," I say. Racism here isn't overt—when I wear a sari or a salwar kameez, some people just speak slowly and loudly. They've never seen my kind of Indian before.

Here's the thing: I've always wanted to be a mother. I'm in a relationship now, and we're trying; for years, though, I was single, and it seemed donor sperm would be my best option. The problem was figuring out what donor to choose. If I picked a white man, my child would likely look white, if a bit tan. If I picked an Indian, I would have a mostly Indian child. Would that be fair, given that she'd be the only girl of her kind around? I can go days without seeing someone who looks like me. Sometimes I actually drive to the nearby reservation just to catch a glimpse of other brown people at the gas station. Yet I would never leave. This is where I'm from. I'm more comfortable in a cowboy bar in Medicine Bow than I would be anywhere else.

If I conceive with the man I love, my baby's life will be easier because she will be whiter. That's an ugly thought. But I see how nervous people get when I tie a scarf around my head to keep warm. If I can protect my child from that, I want to. I would be glad for her never to know what it's like to have darker skin than most everyone she meets. How I envy people who have children without needing to debate which part of themselves to betray.



"Why is it insensitive to think nonwhite actors shouldn't play 19th-century English lords and ladies?"



"Once and for all: 'black' or 'African American'?"

IN PASSING

On life as a border girl. BY ALEX ZARAGOZA

I'm an American citizen, born in Chula Vista, California—Spanish for “beautiful view.” At age 12, my life took a turn when a business venture required my Mexican parents to move us to Tijuana, where they built us a stucco house overlooking the busiest international land border in the Western Hemisphere. They were happy to move, but they wanted me to continue my education in America, land of endless opportunity. So we listed my grandmother's address on school paperwork and crossed the border five days a week.

At 4:30 every morning, my alarm jolted me awake. In our busted-up Mercedes-Benz, I applied my eyeliner while we inched closer to the checkpoint, silently rehearsing my answers for Border Patrol: “U.S. citizen,” “nothing to declare.” We usually crossed with no issues, but sometimes we were stopped. When I was 15, an agent took me to a room for a private pat-down. Detecting my maxi pad, she made me pull down my underwear to prove I had my period—and wasn't smuggling cocaine in my Always.

My mom's depression was exacerbated by the stress of the crossings; overheating during full-on anxiety attacks, she'd strip

off her shirt and sit in the driver's seat in her thick, lacy bra, trying to cool down. During one crossing, we watched as a dead man's body was lifted off the freeway. Another day, I saw a motorist take a baseball bat to a car that had cut him off in line. At the border, tensions always ran high.

My parents endured all this because they had a larger goal: giving me the ability to “pass.” I had a lot going for me in that regard—my lack of an accent, my education, and my light skin granted me privilege on both sides of the border, even when my race didn't. My mother may have been a housekeeper and my father may have picked fruit as a child, but I wouldn't have to.

I never really thought much about my parents' choice. Then, in college, a boyfriend asked me: Why had my family thrown away everything we'd worked so hard for by going back to Mexico? Why reverse our progress? I stammered an explanation while considering the implication—that going back to my roots meant failure.

Now I live in San Diego, where I spend my days working at a nonprofit and my nights erupting in wine cackles with friends. But I'll never forget being made to feel like a criminal, a “beaner,” an undesirable. Sometimes trying to open people's minds is an exercise in fear and frustration, like banging your head against a wall. But any wall that can be built can also be torn down.

REALITY CHECK

A FORCE FOR GOOD

Criminologist **David Kennedy** on closing the trust gap between black Americans and cops.

When you hear the words “race in America,” what's the first thing that comes to mind? For many, it's what we see every day in the news: black men versus police; violence and crime. Problems that seem to have no solution.

I'm a public safety guy; I help craft strategies to curb the most serious violence in our most troubled communities. American gun violence is concentrated in poor black neighborhoods: At a time when the national homicide rate is down to about 5 per 100,000 every year, young black men in some areas are murdered at rates of 500 per 100,000 or higher. Research shows that people in these areas respect the law, hate violence, and want to be safe. But they don't trust the police. They don't think the police will help them or hold themselves accountable. So when trouble arises, that lack of trust leads a few to take things into their own hands.

And—we're getting to it now—why *should* they trust the police, who are the most visible face of our government? The cold fact of American history is that black people's experience of that government has been one of oppression. Our country was founded on slavery; in many

places the origins of policing were in slave patrols. After slavery ended, it was the police who enforced segregation and much worse. When the civil rights reforms of the 1960s did away with Jim Crow laws, the police were on the front end of the “war on crime” and “war on drugs” that created mass incarceration. A black man is more likely to go to prison now than before we ended Jim Crow.

There is good work being done to reform policing—from recruiting officers who better reflect the communities they police to training them in implicit bias, de-escalation, and transparency. But nothing can undo history. If black communities are to trust the police, and if we are to increase public safety, we must purposefully break from the past. Many in law enforcement agree. Last fall Terrence Cunningham, president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, told a crowd of his peers that police had often been “the face of oppression” and needed to “acknowledge and apologize for the actions of the past and the role that our profession has played in society's historical mistreatment of communities of color.” He got a standing ovation. That Cunningham had the courage to

say this, and that so many officers embraced it, is big.

Reconciliation is possible. It starts with the sort of frank admissions Cunningham made, continues with both sides telling their stories, and requires that we address the damage done and remedy our failures going forward.

At a recent meeting of black pastors—friends of the police—I asked the men to raise their hand if they'd never been profiled. No hands went up. I routinely ask black friends if they know somebody who was murdered or somebody in prison; nobody says no. I ask white friends these questions, and they look at me like I'm crazy. Until school shootings gave them a tiny taste of what many black parents live with, I didn't know any white parents who worried their kids would leave in the morning and not come home. I still don't know any who worry very much that the police will shoot their sons.

Public safety means not being afraid of our neighbors; it also means not being afraid of the government, its agents, and its power. That, bluntly, has never been true for black Americans, and if we are to become the country we want to be, this has to change.

PAGE 143: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION (2); UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE/UG VIA GETTY IMAGES; DOROTHY H. LANGE/ALAMY; CHASE SWIFT/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES; JENAL COUNTS/GETTY IMAGES; ANDREW HARRER/BLUMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN MAZUR/ALAMY; STOCK: JOSEPH WRIGHT OF DERBY/ART IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; BETTMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; BETTMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

On the bitter push-pull that has defined race relations in America.

PROGRESS

REGRESS



Benjamin Franklin petitions Congress to **abolish slavery**.

Petition ridiculed, tabled. One month later, **Naturalization Act of 1790** limits citizenship to whites.



Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel **Uncle Tom's Cabin** passionately advocates for end of slavery...

...and advances pervasive stereotypes: mammy, pickaninny, tragic mulatto, Uncle Tom.



Mexicans in New Mexico **receive full U.S. citizenship** after state's admission to Union.

Whites of Forsyth County, Georgia, violently drive out nearly 1,100 of their black neighbors.



W.E.B. Du Bois publishes **The Negro**, seminal history of African and African American people and their achievements in America.

D.W. Griffith's film **The Birth of a Nation** portrays black men as unintelligent and sexually aggressive toward white women; emboldens Ku Klux Klan.



Nineteenth Amendment gives women right to vote.

Most African American women, like African American men, prevented from voting in Southern states.



National Labor Relations Act guarantees right to organize and form unions.

Act **excludes farm and domestic jobs**, historically held by African Americans and Latinos.

Bracero Program invites **Mexican citizens to work** temporarily in U.S.

President Roosevelt authorizes **mass internment of more than 120,000 Japanese American** citizens and documented immigrants.



In **Brown v. Board of Education**, Supreme Court unanimously **rules segregation in public schools unconstitutional**.

Immigration and Naturalization Service institutes "Operation Wetback" to deport undocumented Mexicans living in U.S.

Rosa Parks keeps seat on bus.

Emmett Till murdered for whistling at white woman who, decades later, will admit to false testimony.

Some 250,000 attend March on Washington, hear Martin Luther King Jr. deliver "I Have a Dream" speech.

Klan members bomb 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four black girls in Sunday school.

President Johnson signs Civil Rights Act of 1964, outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin.

Civil rights workers Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman murdered by Klansmen in Mississippi.



In **Loving v. Virginia**, Supreme Court rules **prohibiting interracial marriage unconstitutional**.

During "Long Hot Summer," race riots erupt across U.S., killing dozens, injuring thousands, setting stage for historic violence of 1968.

President Bush proposes "guest worker" plan permitting undocumented immigrants working in U.S. to apply for temporary status...

...but allows **U.S. Border Patrol agents to deport** them with no hearing before immigration judge.



Sonia Sotomayor becomes first Latina Supreme Court justice.

Harvard professor, **renowned scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. arrested** on suspicion of breaking and entering—at his own home.



Federal courts **halt enforcement of President Trump's order** effectively banning Muslim immigrants from seven countries.

Trump signs revised order; stays silent in face of increasing violence against mosques; moves forward on Dakota Access Pipeline, Mexican border wall...





A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF
PEOPLE BELIEVE
TRIBAL PEOPLE *still live and dress*
AS THEY DID **300 YEARS AGO.**

During my tenure as principal chief of the **CHEROKEE NATION,**

national news agencies
requesting interviews sometimes asked if they could
film a tribal dance
or if I would wear traditional tribal clothing

FOR THE INTERVIEW.

I doubt they asked
THE PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES
to dress like a **Pilgrim.**

—Wilma Mankiller

I Feel Bad About Paula Deen

On Southern shame.

BY AMY MACLIN

Though I've lived in New York for more than 20 years, I have a Tennessee drawl that betrays my Southern roots. People get a kick out of it. They find Southernness funny, all that fiddlin' and griddlin'. Nobody ever associates me with my homeland's deplorable racial history. Or at least I thought they didn't. Then Paula Deen planned her dream wedding.

Actually, it was her brother's wedding, as you may recall from news of the discrimination suit a few years ago. According to the former employee who filed it, Paula envisioned a "Southern plantation" theme, with a waitstaff of white-shirted, bow-tied black men—only, allegedly, she didn't say "black men." Paula insisted that part of the story wasn't true; the claim was dismissed on a technicality. But in her deposition, she admitted to using the N word before—though she noted that "things have changed since the '60s in the South."

I'd always thought Paula was a hoot. She put a burger between two Krispy Kreme doughnuts! She's hog-wild, y'all! Why hadn't I seen her ham and banana casserole for what it was—the banality of evil? I

knew plenty of people wouldn't be surprised if she wanted to turn black men into retro set pieces. Racism, like biscuits and magnolias, was just another thing that made Southerners who we were.

I tend to forget I'm Southern unless someone brings it up. I hate when people imitate my accent, the way it turns me into a mash-up of Scarlett O'Hara, Julia Sugarbaker, and the two Blanches (DuBois and Devereaux). Of course, I laugh anyway because I assume everybody is in on the joke. But in the wake of Paulagate, I questioned what else people had been thinking, what things they assumed my family said when no one could hear.

My countrywoman and I were drawn into an unholy kinship of disgrace by association. When I had to call a new African American colleague on the West Coast who'd never met me face-to-face, I wondered: Was it Paula he imagined on the other end of the line, crocheting a Mammy-doll tissue cozy? My face flushed, as if I'd embarrassed myself. I could muster all my charm, but it would prove nothing; everybody knows white Southern ladies are good fakers. I couldn't say, "Hey, before we hang up? I'm not Paula Deen."

Nine hundred miles and two decades away from my life in Tennessee, I'd thought I was no more speechless and remorseful about racism than any other white American, but I was wrong. There's an expression we have in the South: ugly as homemade sin. Paula, homemade sin is part of our legacy, just like lard—which might be delicious but is poison, too. We'd be fools to forget it.

Of course there are differences. I don't see too many people of color doing macramé or making popcorn balls at Christmas or signing up for Frisbee tournaments—and hey, that's okay!

—Gayle King

Girl Who Codes

On knowing your audience. BY JAGGER BLAEC

I've been code-switching all my life—altering how I speak depending on who's around—starting when I was a girl in Connecticut, where I was always the only black kid in my class.

I first learned how it was done at home, where my CPA father and PhD mom would walk through the door and shed their professional demeanor as effortlessly as they hung up their coats. Their conversation bounced from English to Shona, their native tongue from Zimbabwe. Safely inside our center-hall colonial, my parents, siblings, and I didn't have to pretend. But Mom and Dad lectured me about avoiding Ebonics (a.k.a. African American vernacular)—to be "articulate" in the white world.

In college, I finally developed relationships with black people outside my family. Maybe it shouldn't have come as a surprise when one of them told me, "You talk like a white girl." I knew I didn't sound like Queen Latifah on *Living Single*, but I was caught off guard. So I kept enunciating with my professors and started slinging slang in the dorm. I still code-switch, like when I tell my bestie that a party was "lit," then explain to my boss that "last night was fun." It's just easier that way.

I used to wonder whether my parents were ashamed of being black. But I know now that's not why they code-switched. They loved their blackness; they just worried that the rest of the world didn't share the feeling.

Awkward Questions from Well-Intentioned People

For answers, go to oprah.com/awkwardQs

"Why do Asian parents put so much pressure on their kids?"



"Do Muslim women feel oppressed by the men in their lives?"

Hello, Cruel World

On refugees and indignities.

BY MONIQUE TRUONG

Between the ages of 7 and 9, I was called Jap, Gook, Chink, Ching Chong, and Chineese, interchangeably, every day at school in the tiny North Carolina town where my refugee family was resettled. At first, I thought my new classmates misunderstood my country of origin, so I'd helpfully tell them, "I'm from Vietnam!"

I'd already learned English from a summer's worth of television and, thanks to *Sesame Street*, some Spanish, too. Neither language helped me comprehend the hate and derision the other children instantly felt toward me. Their faces and laughter taught me that lesson. Their epithets were powerful punches to my face and body.

When I first came home in tears, my parents, both fluent in English, knew exactly what the slurs meant. But they were newly displaced, too, and discombobulated, and demoralized by their sudden inability to protect me. What they offered was undoubtedly true but of little solace: "Those children are ignorant. They just don't know any better." So, in school, I learned to protect myself by becoming mute. I still have my report card with the D- in "oral communication."

I long ago chose not to have children, but it took me years to trace my decision back to the North Carolina state line. When

I share my memories of being bullied and how those long-ago experiences have affected my adult life, the person I'm talking to will inevitably stop me to commiserate: "Oh, honey, children are the cruelest. We were all called names growing up."

The first point isn't true. I've never met a child as cruel and cunning as an adult. The second point is more complicated. Yes, other children were also subjected to name-calling, perhaps even related to their body and appearance (Four Eyes, Metal Mouth, Fatso). But that doesn't lessen the specific hurt of being singled out for your race or ethnicity. Whether the speaker intends to or not, her point that we all share a common hurt ignores context, ignores history, and refuses to see me for who I am.

I've often asked myself how my parents could have comforted me. Maybe they could have said they knew how much it hurt to be mocked, that in my place, they too would cry. But this might be the wrong question. The responsibility to protect me belonged to every adult in that small town. They failed to model kindness. They failed to impart empathy. They exposed their children to the grotesque language of bigotry. They failed their children, and they failed me.

I can't look inside anyone's heart and see why it expands toward some people and contracts against others, so I can't presume to offer a how-to for compassion. That necessary work is for each of us to do for all the children in our lives. Not just our own.

What if, ladies and gentlemen, today I told you that anyone here who was born on a Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday was free to leave right now? Also, they'd be given the most central parking spots in the city, and the biggest houses.

They would get job interviews before others who were born later in the week, and they'd be taken first at the doctor's office, no matter how many patients were waiting in line.

If you were born from Thursday to Sunday, you might try to catch up—but because you were straggling behind, the press would always point to how inefficient you are.

And if you complained, you'd be dismissed for playing the birth-day card....

Seems silly, right?

But what if on top of these arbitrary systems that inhibited your chances for success, everyone kept telling you that things were actually pretty equal?

—Jodi Picoult,
Small Great Things: A Novel



PHOTOGRAPH BY Chris Buck

Awkward Questions from Well-Intentioned People

For answers, go to oprah.com/awkwardQs

“Why do white people always overshare with strangers?”



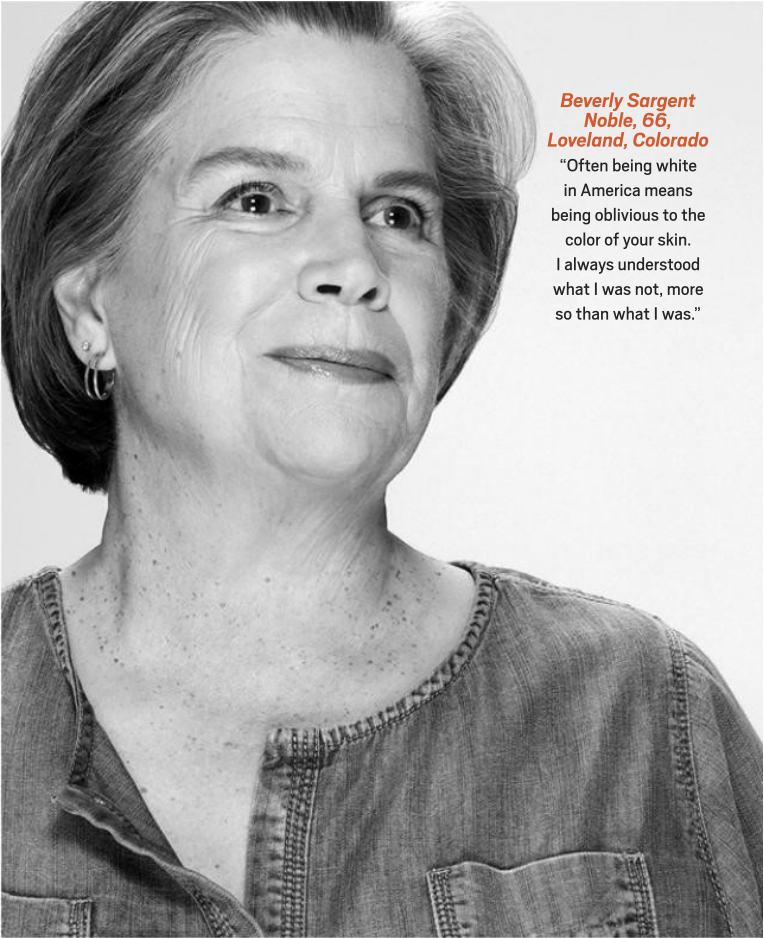
“When a group of Asian or Latina women suddenly switch to their native tongue, is it because they’re saying mean things about me?”



**MOMENTS
OF TRUTH**

**Latasha Kennedy,
37, Brooklyn**


"At my small liberal arts college in Ohio, my professor insisted on calling me by the wrong name: Latisha. When I finally corrected him, he shrugged and said, 'Same difference.'"



**Beverly Sargent
Noble, 66,
Loveland, Colorado**

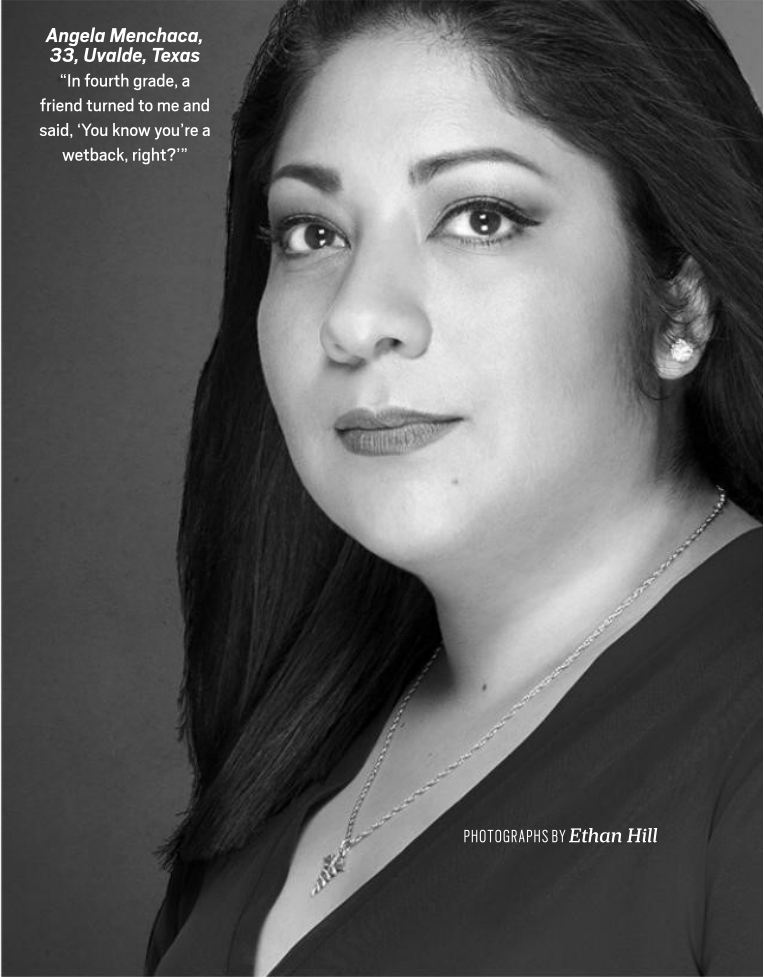
"Often being white in America means being oblivious to the color of your skin. I always understood what I was not, more so than what I was."

**Nicole Lee,
40, Oakland**



"I'm constantly asked where I'm from. When I reply, 'Oakland,' the person usually says, 'No, where are you really from?' It's a subtle message that if you're Asian, you won't ever truly be American. But this is the only country I've ever lived in—my grandmother was born here."

**Angela Menchaca,
33, Uvalde, Texas**



"In fourth grade, a friend turned to me and said, 'You know you're a wetback, right?'"

PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Ethan Hill*

REALITY
CHECK

THE WHITE STUFF

Claudia Rankine on revealing the invisible.

Last year African American poet Claudia Rankine—author of 2014’s award-winning *Citizen*, a meditation on everyday racism—received a MacArthur Fellowship and announced her plans for the \$625,000 stipend: helping establish the Racial Imaginary Institute, a New York City space for art exhibits, lectures, and films that will investigate whiteness. We were curious....

O: *Why whiteness?*

Claudia Rankine: Every sphere of life—housing, healthcare, education, the justice system—is in part defined along racial lines. White-dominated institutions draw those lines, so if you’re white, they’re probably invisible to you. You’re not thinking, *My child’s school has a library because of my skin color.* The idea of whiteness as the standard runs so deep. Just do a Google image search for “boys being boys” or “beautiful women,” and see how many white people come up versus people of color. We can’t talk about race without talking about what our culture privileges.

O: *Does the term whiteness make white people defensive?*

CR: They’ll anxiously insist, “I’m not racist.” Well, yes, you are. We all have biases—only I don’t have power behind mine. If we can understand that racism is an active force, we can figure out how we got here. Think about sexism. Until some men could admit that it existed, men and women couldn’t have a dialogue about it.

O: *So white people need to get more comfortable with being uncomfortable.*

CR: Yes. You know, when critics praise work by an artist of color, they’ll often say the themes are universal—which just means white Americans can read or view it without feeling discomfort. But if a work brings in historical unpleasantries or white privilege, it’s categorized as political—black, lesbian, gay, Arab. “Universal” has been encoded to mean “white.”

O: *What’s truly universal?*

CR: Death is universal. The fact that we are born and we die. How we travel from that first moment to the last moment is much more complicated.

Scene, Not Heard

On performance anxiety.

BY LISA KO

“I’m going to teach you how to act like a real Oriental girl.”

It’s 1990, and a white woman has just said this to me in a room full of stage props behind my junior high auditorium. I’m wearing dragon-print pajamas for my role as Liat in *South Pacific*. When the choir director offered me the part, I was surprised. I hadn’t even auditioned.

The pajamas are supposed to be Chinese—or, like my character in the play, Tonkinese, which I know of only as a breed of cat. My family is Chinese American; in real life, I wear thrift-store dresses and combat boots.

After a few rehearsals, it’s clear I can’t act, and so the white woman, a classmate’s mother, is dispatched to be my tutor.

“Oriental girls walk in small steps, with their heads down,” she says, shuffling haltingly.

She should know: Before moving to New Jersey, she lived on a Korean military base.

My walk is too fast, too aggressive, she says.

“But this is how I’ve always walked,” I say.

“Oriental girls speak softly,” she says. Funny, all the women in my family have to shout to be heard over one another. When she demonstrates the more demure tone I’m to adopt, she uses the singsong, ching-chong cadence kids use to make fun of me. When I attempt this fake accent onstage, I feel like I’m mocking my grandma.

In the end, the director cuts my lines. I stand onstage, silent, an object being sung to. I’m confused; I don’t realize yet how angry I am. I don’t know yet that all I’ve failed to do is be someone else’s idea of me. But while a blonde girl—her face spray-painted dark brown—sings “Happy Talk” to me in Pidgin English, I decide: Onstage or off, I’ll never act again.

“The objective reality is that virtually no one who is white understands the challenge of being black in America.”

—Newt Gingrich



PHOTOGRAPH BY *Chris Buck*

Awkward Questions from Well-Intentioned People

For answers, go to oprah.com/awkwardQs

“Why don’t white parents make their kids behave?”



“Do most black people mistrust white people?”





Buddy System

On 30 years of delighting in difference.

New York City writers Margo Jefferson and Elizabeth Kendall signed up for the same tap-dancing class in 1983—and they've been best friends ever since.

MARGO: I think we were drawn together because even though I'm black and you're white, our lives mirrored each other's in important ways. We're both Midwesterners. We went to private schools but came from progressive families. And we went to college in the '60s, when people talked about *everything*.

ELIZABETH: My radical mother often took us to civil rights demonstrations, but you were my first real black friend. I didn't want to make a wrong step, but with you, I felt the gates had been thrown open.

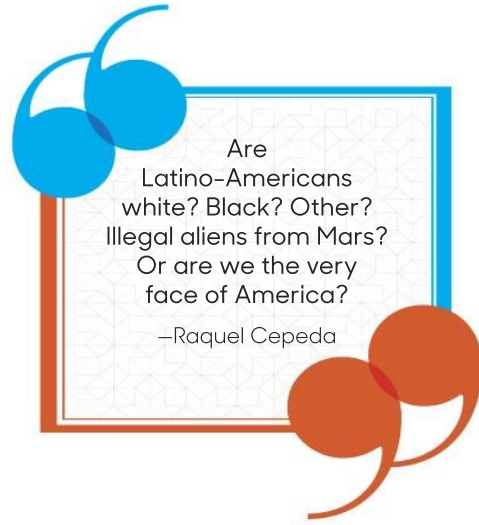
MARGO: I grew up between two worlds, black and white, which taught me how to test people. I'd throw a topic out—"Let me tell you about that time my family went to Atlantic City and they gave us that lousy hotel room...." When I could see you were truly appalled, not guilty, I'd take it a little further.

ELIZABETH: It was thrilling to discuss those things. Difference is a friendship aphrodisiac. The real threshold was when you let me into your world, and I'd be the only white person at your family's table. My mother had died by then. She'd defied old friends to fight segregation and would have been so happy we had a real relationship. That was healing for me.

MARGO: I love that. At first, I may have seemed exotic, but you were looking for something familiar and human.

ELIZABETH: I realized how different our worlds were when we went to Cornwall together. We got lost and I said, "I'll call a cab—can you go to that pub to ask for our address?" When you squared your shoulders, I suddenly thought about what it might be like to walk in there as a black woman, so I said, "I'll go in." That experience never left me.

MARGO: Then there are those times when I'm very aware of you as a capital-W White Person.



ELIZABETH: Like when I call the waiter over to send a meal back?

MARGO: Exactly—waiters of every race! You take that kind of privilege for granted. My family and friends were often the first black patrons of nicer restaurants, and we were always aware that we had to be on very good behavior. But you don't worry about being punished.

ELIZABETH: That makes me cry.

MARGO: Oh, let's laugh—you know I can be obnoxious when I need to. Speaking of obnoxious, I've always loved that when we're with my black friends, you never jump in and bring race into the conversation. That's one of the big mistakes a white friend can make, just saying out of nowhere, "God, the most terrible racist thing just happened," or "Let me tell you what my bigoted cab driver said."

ELIZABETH: If I'm ever inappropriate, you can just jab me in the thigh. I also have to hold myself back from saying, "Oh, I know all about that. My best friend's black."

MARGO: Yes, you do. It's bad race manners. I do always register interracial friendships among my writing students. I can't help it.

ELIZABETH: It's funny, if we're walking down the street and see an interracial couple—

MARGO: We're always interested.

ELIZABETH: We're like, "Good for you!" At our age, I realize how precious this bond is. You know where I am at all times, and I know where you are. We're family.

MARGO: You're born with a family, but you can also choose one.

"Is it explicitly taught in white families that African American people are inferior?"



"Why don't black women like to get their hair wet?"



"Is it cultural appropriation if a white person fist-bumps?"

Try This!

Seven easy ways to be a better citizen, starting right now.

Be Open for Business.

“Workplace diversity is about more than hiring people of different ethnicities,” says Keith Yamashita, founder of the workplace-transformation firm SY Partners: “You have to work at being truly welcoming and inclusive. It’s the little everyday things—microbehaviors, microchoices, microactions”—that can make an environment harmonious or hostile. Try asking yourself...

Whom do I mentor, and why? When I need advice, whom do I ask? At meetings, who speaks up? Are certain voices favored over others? What judgment am I passing when I listen to others’ stories, analyses, and ideas? When I start a project, do I consider perspectives other than my own? When I walk into a room full of new people, whom do I acknowledge first, and whom do I not see?

Keep Your Hands to Yourself.

When you see a head of hair so awesome that you want to reach out and touch, here’s a piece of advice: **Don’t!** No matter how curious you are, hair is personal.

READ WIDELY.

To discover more authors of color, don’t rely on the canon (Modern Library’s 100 best novels include 94 by white writers). Start with *O* books editor Leigh Haber’s list of singular storytellers:

Junot Díaz: The Dominican American novelist explores race, diaspora, and dislocation in an electric style.

Han Kang: Gorgeous Gothicism is this standout South Korean writer’s specialty.

Adonis: A Syrian poet known as the T.S. Eliot of the Arab-speaking world.

Gwendolyn Brooks: The black poet probes self-doubt, womanhood, race, and power.

Sherman Alexie: American Indian lives—on and off the reservation—rendered with delicious wit.

Stay Real.

The best antidote to racism is for people from different groups to get acquainted, says Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton, PhD, of the University of California, Berkeley. But the aim is to *connect*, not show off how enlightened you are: In a Princeton study, white subjects took a test that measured unconscious bias, then were paired with black partners to discuss race. Researchers found that white people with lower bias scores were *less* liked by their black partners. “If someone’s making a big effort to look egalitarian, he or she may seem fake,” says Mendoza-Denton. “You’re both human beings—just listen, be thoughtful, and stay present.”

Dine Boldly.

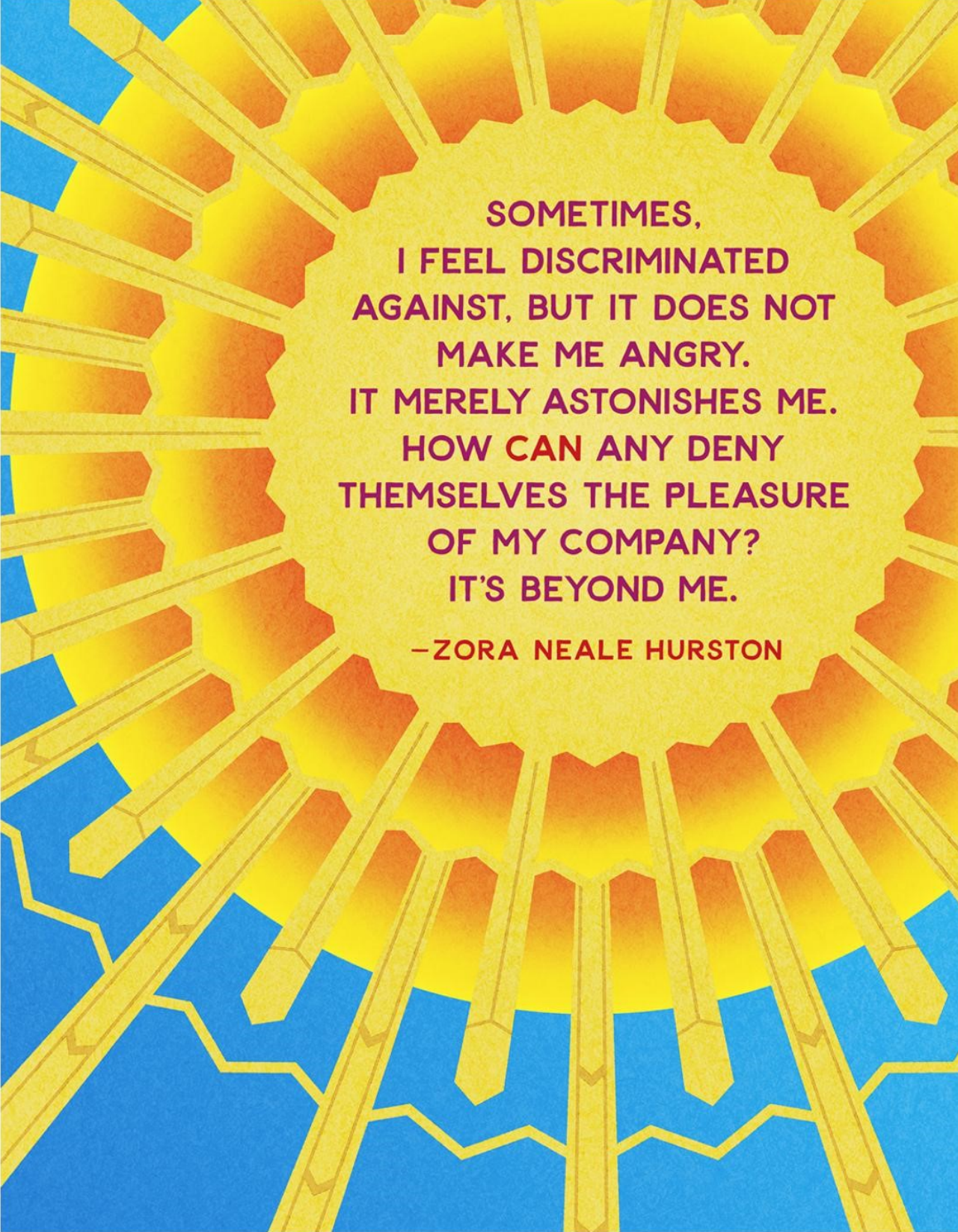
You might be wary of bone-in goat steaks or curried duck tongue. But if you only stick to the foods you know, you miss out on an essential way to connect with other cultures. It’s small, but it’s a start (often a tasty one).

Say Something.

Neither of my parents—an Appalachian hillbilly and a Midwestern farmer—is ever intentionally racist, but their understanding of what constitutes acceptable talk doesn’t always align with the rest of society’s. The good news? They want to learn. So we have a tradition called “right hand if it’s racist.” When someone says something inappropriate, those who find it offensive raise their right hand. The speaker gets to ponder where she went wrong, but no one makes it a big, shameful deal. Even without a handy tradition, we’d all do well to speak up in a way that aims to educate, not castigate. I’ve been on the receiving end of that right hand myself, and it makes me strive to be better. —ELLY LONON

Don’t Maim the Name.

As Rita Dove wrote, “Listen how they say your name. If they can’t say that right, there’s no way they’re going to know how to treat you proper, neither.” Acknowledging people’s names acknowledges their humanity and shows that you respect them enough to get it right. Ask till you’re sure, then pronounce it as it was pronounced. You can do it!



**SOMETIMES,
I FEEL DISCRIMINATED
AGAINST, BUT IT DOES NOT
MAKE ME ANGRY.
IT MERELY ASTONISHES ME.
HOW CAN ANY DENY
THEMSELVES THE PLEASURE
OF MY COMPANY?
IT'S BEYOND ME.**

—ZORA NEALE HURSTON