



# DIVERSITY & INCLUSION NEWSLETTER

Whatcom Family YMCA

March, 2021

## SO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT RACE

### BOOK REVIEW

By: Kirsten Barron

One of the wonderful parts of being a member of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee (DEI Committee) at the Whatcom YMCA is that we share good information, articles, trainings and good conversation in the course of what we hope is good DEI work for our Y. One of the things we have done as a group is to read Ijeoma Oluo's, 'So You Want to Talk About Race.' Ijeoma's book was published in 2019 and is a New York Times bestseller. She is a graduate of Western Washington University and is a thought leader on race in our country.



Ijeoma's style is frank, clear, direct and thoughtful. She is informational and persuasive, rather than blaming or shaming. Her stories, mostly about her own experiences, are engaging and educational.

Her book talks about what racism is, what privilege is, intersectionality, how race is related to police brutality, affirmative action, the school-to-prison pipeline, cultural appropriation, hair, microaggressions, anger, the myth of the minority and Al Sharpton. It's a comprehensive look at some of the ways race impacts and effects experiences – and outcomes – in the world.

The chapters discussing, 'What if I talk about race wrong?' and 'What if I am called a racist?' were the most helpful and interesting to me. Ijeoma says, "we're going to screw this up" and that was a relief for me to hear. Nobody is expecting me to be perfect – far from it. I loved her basic tips to decrease my chance of a race conversation disaster: stating my intentions, remembering my top priority is to better understand racism, keep doing my research and learning and being aware of when I feel defensive, and asking myself why. My favorite part was the cautionary note not to tone-police. In other words, if someone is angry during our conversation, I need to be able to hold that anger to better understand where it's coming from, rather than telling somebody I don't like the tone of their voice. It is not about tone, but about the substance. One of her helpful hints was not to force people of color into discussions about race. In all candor, I was sorry to see she had to say this. This just seems like a basic boundary issue to me.

The chapter about what to do if I get called a racist was the most interesting. I loved her tips here as well – listen, set my intentions aside, try to hear the impact of what I have done, recognize that I don't have all of the information about this as I am not a person of color and did not have the experience, nobody owes me a debate about what I did (which takes me right back to listen), and apologize, a real, live, apology. I'm pretty certain that my pain over being called a racist is far less than the pain of those who have experienced racism. It seems fair I should be able to bear the discomfort in exchange for righting the wrongs that have been done to people of color and creating more equity in our world. In fact, maybe is the least I can do.

I highly recommend this book. It is interesting, accessible, informational and hopeful.

## BOOK IS STILL AVAILABLE

The Y has purchased several copies of So You Want to Talk About Race, and there are still some available for staff who wish to read this book. If you would like a copy, email Lynda at [lpurdie@whatcomymca.org](mailto:lpurdie@whatcomymca.org).

## BREAK THE SILENCE

On March 5th the YMCA's Asian Pacific Islanders Leadership Network hosted a session promoting a call for the Y and society to Break the Silence and condemn the uprising of racist and violent attacks against Asian Pacific Islanders.

On Tuesday, March 16, at least three Atlanta-area spas had shootings that left 8 people dead, including 6 Asian women. Georgia State Senator, Michelle Au, said that regardless of what authorities determine to be the motive, "it is taking place in a landscape where Asian-Americans are increasingly terrified and fearful for their lives and their safety."

Please take some time to watch the recording of this session to better understand what this community is experiencing. [Click on this link to go to the recording.](#)