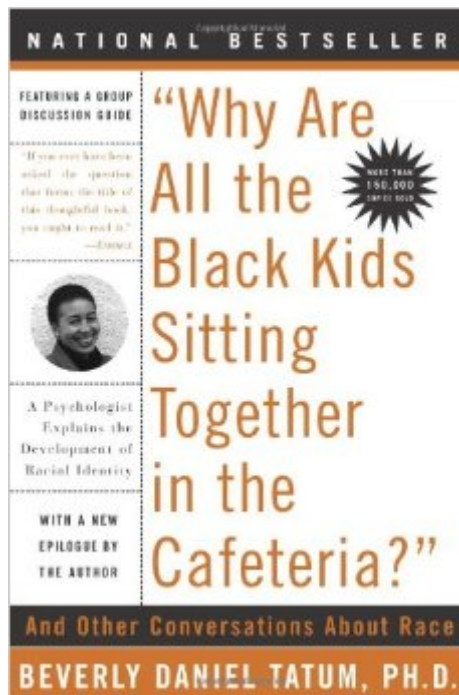


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Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together In The Cafeteria: And Other Conversations About Race



Synopsis

Walk into any racially mixed high school and you will see black youth seated together in the cafeteria. Of course, it's not just the black kids sitting together-the white, Latino, Asian Pacific, and, in some regions, American Indian youth are clustered in their own groups, too. The same phenomenon can be observed in college dining halls, faculty lounges, and corporate cafeterias. What is going on here? Is this self-segregation a problem we should try to fix, or a coping strategy we should support? How can we get past our reluctance to talk about racial issues to even discuss it? And what about all the other questions we and our children have about race? Beverly Daniel Tatum, a renowned authority on the psychology of racism, asserts that we do not know how to talk about our racial differences: Whites are afraid of using the wrong words and being perceived as "racist" while parents of color are afraid of exposing their children to painful racial realities too soon. Using real-life examples and the latest research, Tatum presents strong evidence that straight talk about our racial identities-whatever they may be-is essential if we are serious about facilitating communication across racial and ethnic divides. We have waited far too long to begin our conversations about race. This remarkable book, infused with great wisdom and humanity, has already helped hundreds of thousands of readers figure out where to start.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As you review all the "reviews" thus far written, you get a sense that Dr. Tatum's book has gotten people thinking and taking stands. I appreciate the straightforwardness with which Tatum introduces

her subject -- racism. Sure, we can disagree with her definitions and use of rhetorics. But she made the definition clear and prominent enough so that we can disagree. It is hard to measure oneself by a wishy-washy yard-stick. Tatum provided a solid yard stick by which you may examine your own stance, assumptions, and conclusions. In reading the reviews, especially the critical ones, it struck me that even those who strongly disagreed with Tatum understood her basic premises and her arguments. It is upon that understanding that we can disagree. I applaud the author for clearly laying out her arguments on a controversial issue. The main strength of the book, to me, is in fact the redefinition of racism. You don't have to agree with it, but you do now need to examine whether a "system of advantage" exists and if it does, whether it should be included in the definition of racism. I am neither white nor black, so I cannot speak of black/white issues in first-person. But I come from a family with four generations of academics. The system of school, academia, and education benefits me greatly, and I suit the system particularly through my upbringing. By analogy, I am open to the idea that past explicit systems of racial inequality do not lose its effect in a mere generation or two, especially for the black race. (Sorry to be imprudent, but Comedian Louis C.K. had this great line about, "White people want to add 100 years to every year it has been since slavery.

Not until recently have I, as a 20-year-old white American college student, really become aware of the extent of my own white privilege and what it means to be white in America today. Even the fact that I was able to go for so long without recognizing the significance of race in my life is a manifestation of my white privilege. Children of color, however, are generally confronted by the fact of their race at a much earlier age. Their process of identity development differs significantly from that of most white children. This is the issue psychologist Beverly Tatum discusses in her book. She opens with the question that forms the book's title: "Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" It is common to see high school students self-segregate, socializing in groups composed mostly of others of the same racial background. But why is this? Because Tatum herself is a black woman, she predominantly addresses the identity development of black individuals. She cites psychologist William Cross in describing the stages of development: pre-encounter, when young children simply absorb the messages they receive from those around them, not yet having reason to question them; encounter, when an individual first becomes aware of racism through some "event or series of events that force the young person to acknowledge [its] personal impact" (55); immersion/emersion, when the individual works actively to learn about and affirm their own racial identity; and internalization/commitment, when the individual has established a positive personal identity for him/herself. Throughout, Tatum offers explanations for the behaviors many black

adolescents may engage in which may puzzle their white counterparts, including the reason for student self-segregation along racial lines.

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