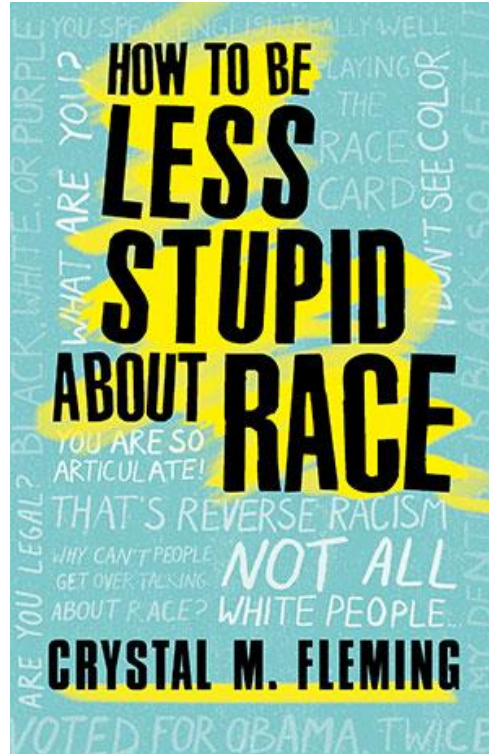


*How to Be Less Stupid About Race* by Crystal Fleming

Readers' Guide



*The Origins of Racial Stupidity/ The Idiot's Guide to Critical Race Theory*

1. Fleming begins with the assertion that living in a racist society exposes all of us to racial ignorance. When in your upbringing did you become aware of race? What role did race play in your childhood and adolescence?
2. What are some of your personal and group identities? Do some of your identities take precedence over others? Does this vary with different situations?
3. Fleming's Class Fallacy and Political Fallacy criticize the misguided assumption that racists are mostly poor whites or political conservatives, respectively. What are some examples of how white supremacy exploits these societal differences to perpetuate systemic racism?
4. Why is it important to recognize the dual aspects of racism as both individual and institutional? What are some examples of institutional racism you have observed?
5. Fleming says that white supremacy today is characterized by politicians and the majority population portraying themselves as "beyond race" or "nonracist." How does this kind of posturing detract from antiracist efforts? Have you observed any examples or effects of the myth of color blindness?

### ***Listen to Black Women***

1. Fleming says that “white women’s (and nonblack women of color’s) hostility toward black women is related to their unwillingness to openly challenge the dynamics of oppression in their own lives.” What are the individual, interpersonal, and institutional consequences of redirecting resentment away from white male supremacy to other groups?
2. Why is it important to recognize black women’s vulnerability as a group when hearing their perspectives? What are some recent examples you have observed?
3. How can vulnerability be transformed and mobilized as a means of empowerment?
4. Though her chapter is called “Listen to Black Women,” Fleming states that merely listening isn’t enough. What other practical steps need to be taken to recognize and respect black women’s knowledge and voices?
5. Fleming engages with Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of “intersectionality” and shows how intersectional analysis is rooted in black feminist thought. Why is intersectionality an important concept for the work of antiracism?
6. Fleming emphasizes the appropriation of black women’s knowledge as a method of devaluing them. What is the relationship between knowledge and power, and how can we better recognize black women’s power?

### ***On Racial Stupidity in the Obama Era***

1. Fleming says, “Today, as in the past, robust critiques of racial oppression necessarily involve a confrontation with class oppression too.” How is this argument related to her Class Fallacy concept in chapter 1? To what extent are socioeconomic status and political affiliation related to race?
2. How does African American privilege outside the United States, in fact, perpetuate systemic racism? Can this phenomenon be applied to other races? How should we contextualize people of color’s privilege within a white supremacist system?
3. The book mentions Ibram X. Kendi’s analysis of Obama’s rhetoric as combining racist and antiracist ideas for the purpose of appealing to both racists and their victims. Why are these messages so effective, and how do they affirm white supremacy?
4. With Obama’s rhetorical tactics in mind, must a political idea be either racist or antiracist? Are there any political ideas that exist that do not concern racism, or are politics inherently bound up with race?
5. Have you ever ignored the problematic actions, beliefs, and aspects of a public figure you support or admire? How did you justify your minimization or denial?

### ***Trump Country***

1. In this chapter, Fleming suggests that “we have always lived in Trump country.” What do you think this means? Why is it important to contextualize Trump’s racism within the history of white supremacy in the United States?
2. Fleming points out how whites historically used concerns over national security to justify Japanese internment during WWII, Islamophobia, refugee denial, and other racial exclusion policies. What assumptions are behind the national security excuse, and how do they fuel racism?

3. What assumptions are behind the idea that white people's economic insecurity can and should be alleviated by racist politicians and policies? What are the effects of these assumptions?
4. How does W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of the "psychological wages of whiteness" relate to white economic insecurity? What are some other examples of white people's psychological wages?
5. What do the two presidential chapters have in common? What do the similarities between Trump's and Obama's presidencies demonstrate about the relationship between racism and the office of the president?

### *Fake Racial News*

1. Fleming debunks the Normalization Thesis, which says that the normalization of white supremacy and the acceptance of public white supremacist views is an entirely new, Trump-era phenomenon. We know that white supremacy has always been the norm in the United States, but do you think it has worsened? If you believe that white supremacy has "worsened," what historical era are you comparing to the present? Is it possible to recognize that white supremacy has always been the norm in this country while also recognizing the ways in which Trump contributes to the mainstreaming of white nationalism and racist extremism? Do you think that Trump won the presidency *despite* or *because* of his openly racist platform? And does his victory and popularity among tens of millions of US citizens indicate the degree to which white supremacy was already "normalized" within the nation?
2. What are some recent examples you have observed of media outlets normalizing white supremacy? Fleming mentions tactics such as circulating racist stereotypes, justifying white violence toward people of color, promoting white-centered perspectives, and privileging the views of white-dominated institutions like the police.
3. What did you make of Fleming's criticism of institutional racism within the *New York Times*?
4. Fleming asks, "Do journalists have a duty to inform the public about institutional racism within the judicial system or about the ineffectiveness of discriminatory policing practices like stop-and-frisk?" What is your opinion? Are journalists unbiased, complicit, or something else?
5. Think of a generalized assumption you make about race. Have you seen recent examples in the media that can cause confirmation bias?
6. What are some personal examples you have observed of implicit white favoritism?

### *Interracial Love 101*

1. Do your friends and family expect your romantic partner to be of a particular race? Do you have any expectations of yourself? What informs these expectations?
2. Fleming draws a distinction between *interracial* relationships and *antiracist* relationships. How would you describe the difference?
3. Fleming points to research showing that the vast majority of white Americans have no close friendships with people of color. What are some of the practices that allow white Americans to exclude people of color from their private lives? What do you think are some of the consequences of white people not building meaningful relationships with people of color?
4. What is the role of segregation in preventing interracial intimacy and solidarity?
5. Fleming says, "Racial vulnerability can't be shared with just anyone at any time; it requires trustworthiness and true intimacy." What are some obstacles to racial vulnerability you have dealt with in your relationships with friends, family members, partners, or coworkers? How can people

- of color develop trusting relationships with whites in a society still ravaged by white supremacy? Who should bear the burden of fostering interracial intimacy—whites, people of color, or both?
6. What anxieties and/or insecurities do you have when relating to people of other races?
  7. What are some things you can do to develop more meaningful *and* antiracist relationships across difference?

### ***Becoming Racially Literate***

1. Fleming argues that because racism is a collective problem, it cannot be solved by individuals. What can you do to identify and collaborate with antiracist allies, organizations, and activists?
2. Reflecting on what you learned about intersectionality, consider your own identities, positionality, and relationship to power. How do they offer you unique insight about how white supremacy is related to other systems of oppression? What are some ways that you can use your identities and knowledge to challenge racism in your daily life?
3. Throughout the book, Fleming pointed out that people of color tend to be more knowledgeable than whites about racism due to their experiences navigating a racist society. However, she also suggests that people of color need to address their racial socialization and relationship to white supremacy. Why is racial literacy not just a “white” issue? Fleming references the dynamics of internalized oppression and stereotype threat. How do these factors affect people of color?
4. What are some collective benefits of eradicating the racial hierarchy beyond those listed by Fleming?
5. What privileges do you enjoy because of racism and/or other systems of oppression? What are some internal and external difficulties you face in giving up that privilege?
6. This chapter provides ten suggestions for committing to the lifelong work of antiracist transformation. As you review each step, what ideas resonate with you? Can you think of ways to apply Fleming’s suggestions in your own life? Moving beyond your individual experience, how might the ten action steps help transform your family, workplace, neighborhood, and other groups with which you are affiliated? What actions can you and members of your community take right now to build a more just and compassionate society?