

Creating Your Racial Autobiography

Start with your **Racial Autobiography Bookends**. What can you recall about the earliest and most recent events and conversations about race, race relations, and/or racism that may have impacted your current perspectives and/or experiences.

- **Earliest:** What was your first personal experience in dealing with race or racism? Describe what happened.
- **Most Recent:** Describe your most recent personal experience in dealing with race or racism. Describe what happened.

To help you think about the time between your earliest and most recent racial experiences, jot down notes to answer the questions below. Let the questions guide but not limit your thinking. Note any other memories or ideas that seem relevant to you. When you have identified some of the landmarks on your racial journey, start writing your autobiography. Remember that it is a fluid document, one that you will reflect on and update many times as your racial consciousness evolves.

1. Family:

- # Are your parents the same race? Same ethnic group? Are your brothers and sisters? What about your extended family -- uncles, aunts, etc.?
- # Where did your parents grow up? What exposure did they have to racial groups other than their own? (Have you ever talked with them about this?)
- # What ideas did they grow up with regarding race relations? (Do you know? Have you ever talked with them about this? Why or why not?)
- # Do you think of yourself as White? As Black? As Asian? As Latino? As American Indian? Or just as "human?" Do you think of yourself as a member of an ethnic group? What is its importance to you?

2. Neighborhood:

- # What is the racial makeup of the neighborhood you grew up in?
- # What was your first awareness of race -- that there are different "races" and that you are a member of a racial group.
- # What was your first encounter with another race? Describe the situation.
- # When and where did you first hear the word, "nigger," or other similar racial slurs?
- # What messages do you recall getting from your parents about race? From others when you were little?

3. Elementary and Middle School:

- # What was the racial makeup of your elementary school? Of its teachers?
- # Think about the curriculum: what Black Americans did you hear about? How did you celebrate Martin Luther King Day? What about Asian Americans, or Latinos, or American Indians?
- # Cultural influences: TV, advertisements, novels, music, movies, etc. What color God was presented to you? Angels? Santa Claus? The tooth fairy! Dolls?
- # What was the racial makeup of organizations you were in? Girl Scouts, soccer team, church, etc.?

4. High School and community:

- ✦ What was the racial makeup of your high school? Of its teachers?
- ✦ Was there interracial dating? Racial slurs? Any conflict with members of another race?
- ✦ Have you ever felt or been stigmatized because of your race or ethnic group membership?
- ✦ What else was important about your high-school years, racially speaking — maybe something that didn't happen in high school but during that time?
- ✦ What is the racial makeup of your hometown? Of your metropolitan area? What about your experiences in summer camp, summer jobs, etc.?

5. Present and Future:

- ✦ What is the racial makeup of the organization you currently work in? Of your circle(s) of friends? Does it meet your needs?
- ✦ Realistically, think about where you want to live (if different from where you are now). What is its racial makeup? Social class makeup? Where do you want to work in the next 10 years? What is its racial makeup? Social class makeup?

6. General:

- ✦ What's the most important image, encounter, whatever, you've had regarding race? Have you felt threatened? In the minority? Have you felt privileged?