

Discussion Guide



The Official *Dear White Friend* Discussion Guide
Created by **Melvin J. Gravely II**



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Notes to the Discussion Host

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to host the discussion of *Dear White Friend*. This discussion guide is designed to support you, the host, and the rest of the group. Race is a complex and often emotional topic. Please consider the notes below as suggestions to help you formulate your approach. Please do not feel compelled to use all of the discussion questions. Pick the most meaningful for you and your discussion mates.

The book, *Dear White Friend*, is designed to be an on ramp to this topic. Others may be more versed and confident and even certain of themselves and their views. To get the most out of this discussion it should be accessible to all. The most important element of these discussions is to insist the tone is reflective of care and consideration. **Please review the notes titled “How Can We Discuss Race as Friends?” with the group prior to starting.**

Preparing for Discussion

Pre-discussion activities for the host:

1. Send participants the Pre-discussion Suggestions.
2. Plan enough time for discussion .
3. Familiarize yourself with the discussion questions before the group meets.
4. Select the questions most appropriate for your group. Do not feel pressure to use all of the questions.

To consider during the session:

- Review “How Can We Discuss Race as Friends?” with the group.
- Take a break every 60 mins.
- Invite people to write down and share their committed actions.

Discussion Logistics

# of participants:	4-10
Time:	1.5 - 2 hours
Tools:	Discussion Guide, Participant Pre-Discussion Guide

Participant Pre-Discussion Suggestions

Book:	Copies of <i>Dear White Friend</i> for each
Assumption:	Participants read, <i>Dear White Friend</i> , prior to the discussion.

A Note from the Author

Introduction

I thank you for your willingness to read *Dear White Friend*. These letters are my perspectives and my ideas. My thoughts were formed by my experiences, based in facts, and written in the spirit of friendship. The goal with these letters was to present you with information and, yes, to challenge your thinking. I hope they made you pause and ponder on examples in your own life. This is now an opportunity for you to explore your own thoughts, reflections and experiences.

The Structure of the Discussion

To help you frame your group conversation, the discussion guide is divided into three sections.

- In the first section I used my own story to create context. During the discussion we hope you will share your story.
- The second section frames the broader context of race in our country. These letters connect examples and data to outcomes. I write about specific decisions that created the gaps between us. My goal was to increase your awareness. During the discussion you will have an opportunity to share the ideas that were most insightful/challenging for you.
- The third and final section proposes specific ideas for action. The ultimate goal of *Dear White Friend* is to drive more enlightened and sustained action. Some activities you can do alone; others will demand a collective response. The key here is to make a commitment to do something different.

How Can We Discuss Race as Friends?

CAUTION: Race is a complex and often emotional topic and therefore it is a difficult discussion. Our nation's history with Black and White people has been long, entrenched and difficult. There are deeply held ideas on all sides of this issue. I ask that you discuss this topic with care and consideration of the thoughts, ideas, perspectives and experiences of others. Establish a common set of expectations for your discussion that might include:

A Note from the Author (cont'd)

- Listen with the intent to understand the perspectives of others and not judge them. Consider why they may feel the way they do based on their experiences and exposure.
- Avoid blaming or labeling people. Labels can be emotional triggers and rarely add to productive conversation.
- Try not to take the comments of others personally.
- Do not over share – there is no need to share personal information beyond your comfort zone.
- Speak from one’s own experience and not from the experiences of others—use “I” statements.
- Be mindful not to dominate the discussion. Give others a turn and monitor your own time speaking.
- Remember your input is valid but no more valid than the input of others.
- Most of all, remember you are likely in a conversation with people with whom you have a relationship you value. Share in a manner that respects and preserves that relationship. Keep in mind participants have agreed to join in this discussion because you have some interest in closing the racial gap between us.

Maybe the most important question to ask yourself as you enter this discussion is “what is my role in all of this?” Pondering this question will bring you into this encounter focused on what you are committed to do.

Thank you again.

Your friend,

Mel



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Discussion Framework & Questions

Part I - What is your story? (Balance the time for each participant.)

1. What made you decide to read *Dear White Friend*?
2. The author opens the book talking about his story because so much of what we believe and understand about race is developed over our personal journey. Tell us about your story.
 - Where did you grow up? How much exposure did you have to other races? How much was the topic of race discussed in your relationship circles (e.g., family, friends, school, etc.)? How much have you talked about race with people not of the same race as you? Where would you say you learned what you know about race?”
 - How comfortable or prepared do you feel discussing race today?
 - How open do you feel you are to the thoughts, opinions and experiences of others?

Part II - What ideas impacted you the most? (Select a few of the ideas in this section. Do not feel compelled to cover them all.)

1. A fundamental premise of the book is the assertion that “Whites on top, Blacks on the bottom and everyone else in between” is the racial construct of America (page 48, 89, 152.) The author offers that this construct has been intentional and serves to perpetuate the gaps between us. He also relies on this framing to highlight the need to focus specifically on Black people. He writes “If we do not, they will fare worse than anyone else as a group” (page 114). The author opens the book talking about his story because so much of what we believe and understand about race is developed over our personal journey. Tell us about your story.

How did you feel about this concept? How did it frame your thinking as you read the book?

2. The author makes the statement he does not believe his white friends are racist (Letter 4) but he goes on to say they are benefiting bystanders.

What are your thoughts about either or both parts of this statement?

3. Throughout the second group of letters, the author laid out a series of themes framing the context of race in America. Some of the themes were:

- how judging others makes it difficult to have the empathy needed to pursue racial equity (letter 5, page 31)
- that Blacks having a different contract with America (letter 7, page 45)
- the challenge of a focus on relieving blacks of suffering but limited attention to access to opportunities to thrive (letter 8, page 55)
- the difference between equality and equity (letter 9, page 65)
- the negative economic impact of racism (letter 10, page 71),
- his admissions of the culpability of Blacks (letter 11, page 81).

Which of the concepts challenged or enlightened your thinking the most? What were your thoughts and why did you select the one you did?

4. The author believes it is essential that we acknowledge our troubled history with race and the lasting implications of that history. The author says, “When you acknowledge the truth of something, you stop trying to diminish its implications, make excuses, or deflect culpability. In this case, you focus on Black equity without the need to dilute the topic...” (Page 96).

How do you feel about this idea of the need to acknowledge our history of race and the current social and economic implications of that history?

5. The author explores the question of why you should care, and do you care enough, and he writes (page 42) “I have been asking you why you care and mentally questioning if you care enough.” Later in the book (page 96) he goes on to ask a similar question in a different way when he writes “the second pillar of equity is to decide Blacks must obtain equity by any means necessary... I do not mean violence and anarchy. But I do mean to decide in a way that leaves no options and sets no limits.” He suggests this level of commitment is needed because the issues of racism are so entrenched in our normal way of seeing things.

How would you articulate why you care about race and racial equity? How do you feel about the level of commitment the author describes as an “unyielding intent” (page 96)? Have you been setting limits and leaving options on the table? If so, why do you think that is?

Part III - What can we do about racial equity together?

Much of the book, *Dear White Friend* is dedicated to ideas about actions we can take on our path to racial equity. The author suggests activities in three areas (page 99).

1. The first is continuing to build our awareness – Building our awareness and familiarity will lead to our own personal level of comfort and empathy.

Do you have activities you are committed to doing related to continuing to build your personal awareness? What will you regularly read, experience, watch or listen to in order to continue developing your awareness and understanding of the complex issues of race?

2. The second call is to “close the gaps between us” through Actions of Intentionality.

What activities are you committed to doing related to Actions of Intentionality? In what ways can you be intentional about how you increase your spending, hiring, promotion, support, and inclusion of Blacks and others?

3. The third call to action is around identifying systems that continue to perpetuate the gap between us. The author highlights fundamental systems to address (page 155). Those systems are housing, education, voting rights, wealth and criminal justice.

Do you have activities to which you have committed to better understand these core systems and how they may function to continue to have a disproportionately negative impact on Black people (and other people of color)? What role can you play in identifying, illuminating them for others to see, and addressing systems perpetuating negative outcomes.

After the Discussion:

Thank you again for your willingness to host a *Dear White Friend* discussion group. To continuously improve this process for future groups and gain honest feedback, we have compiled a short survey for you to complete.

Click the button below to take the survey. Thank you!

[Take the Survey](#)



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Participant Guide



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Pre-discussion activities for participants:

1. Read the book, *Dear White Friend*.
2. Bring the book to the discussion session.
3. Ponder the question “What is my role in all of this?”
4. Review “How Can We Discuss Race as Friends?”

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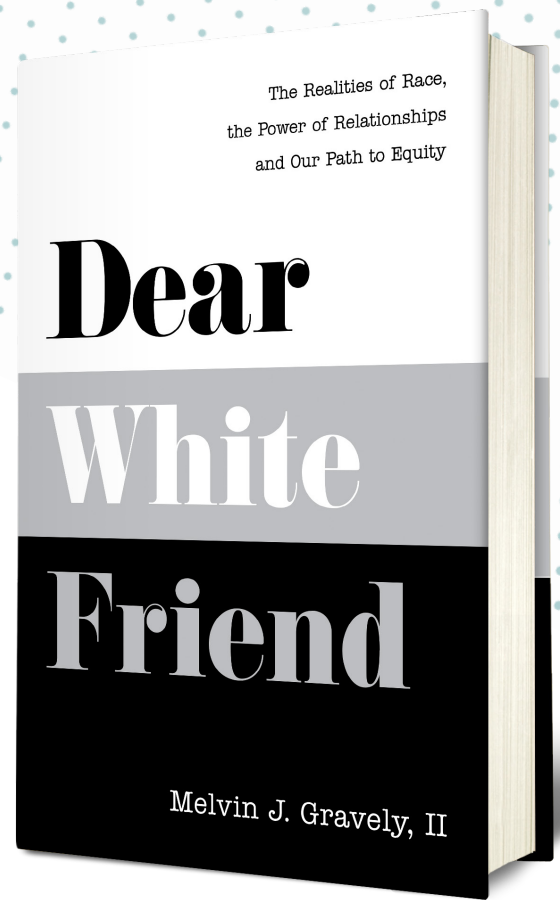
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A Summary of My Committed Actions

Action	Time Frame	Resources Needed	Comments

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