



## **SO, YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT RACE**

Ijeoma Oluo

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**Reviewer:** Richa Bhattarai, PhD Student, Kennesaw State University, Georgia, USA

**Abstract:** *So, You Want to Talk About Race* is a non-fiction book written in 2018 by Ijeoma Oluo. Each chapter title is based on a question in the context of race in contemporary America. The book review demonstrates authors' thoughts on topics as well as advice on how to talk about issues related to race. The review of the book highlights the argument on the United States' political, economic, and social systems, and how they are impacted by systematic and institutional racism. This analysis provides summary of the book and highlights some important components for readers while discussing race-related subjects, such as affirmative action, microaggression, and police brutality.

**Keywords:** Race, Cultural Difference, School System, Microaggression, Gender

### **Introduction**

Racial identity is a person's relationship with a certain racial group in order to confer self-esteem, which helps the person to survive in society (for example, Oluo (2018) joined the Facebook community of people of color in Greater Seattle). Oluo (2018) argues that racism is a systematic construct in the United States, (not biological) and presents her argument through gender, class, and sexual orientation. Racism comes in the form of structural violence as repression and exploitation. The book questions the existence of structural violence in the form of racism and raises points of discussion that make privileged groups uncomfortable. Oluo (2018) argues that proper communication helps to minimize structural violence and makes us understand how important the debate about identity and race is, which contributes to the theoretical debate about gender, class, and cultural differences. The author concludes by

suggesting that people of color and white population should adopt language in order to engage in clear, constructive, and convincing communication with one another about how to deal with racial biases.

### **Chapter Summary and Notable Reviews**

The author's primary approach is to make an argument that the United States is dealing with centuries-old systemic racism rather than personal oppression (Oluo, 2018). The book explores how racism is embedded in American culture, institutions, movements, and all aspects of daily social behavior. Reading the chapters of this book reminds us of how we can know for sure when something is about race and how we are part of the racial system. For example, if someone is commenting on the color of our hair or the shape of our body, we can understand that we are becoming part of the racial system. The author argues that it is our privilege to understand the disadvantages of people of color and that no matter how well-intentioned we are as individuals, our involvement in this system complicates us.

This book differs from other approaches of racial discrimination because it covers some of the more complex issues and their implications, including the intersectionality, the school system, microaggression, police brutality, affirmative action, and cultural appropriation (Oluo, 2018). Each chapter begins with a question followed by a rational explanation. No theoretical argument, disagreement, or analysis is found in this book because all these questions have arisen from her personal experience, daily interactions, and some of them are clearly biased, vague, and mere conjectures raised in her mind. Arguments for these questions are sometimes found on social media that are discussed in chapters, such as, "Why can't I say the 'N' word?" and "I just got called racist, what do I do?"

### **Strength**

One of the strengths of this study was that the book explains how the political, economic, and social systems of the United States are systematically racist. This book is an insight for new immigrants to this country to understand institutional racism and to make them realize what it means to experience racism in their daily lives. For example, the case of George Floyd gave a new dimension to the study of police brutality and how systemic racism has become entrenched in many parts of the United States. The book guides the reader on issues that need to be discussed about the race and suggests what should be done if someone is acting offensively. The experiences and interactions contained in the book provide an understanding of race as a

social issue. Chapters such as 'Checking My Privileges' help evaluate activities designed to serve a dominant culture in American society, for example, the work environment, schools, document status, and so on.

### **Weakness**

One of the weaknesses of this book was that some of its arguments were completely biased and were not supported by scientific research and data. For example, Oluo (2018) experience at Liz's house is completely personal where she was treated as an outsider, other people may not have the same experience when visiting someone. Another weakness of this article was that it emphasized only on the socio-cultural aspects of racial discrimination. The book fails to explain how economic exploitation the foundation of racial oppression is, especially in the last chapter of the book. The book lacks in explaining of why people of color are poorer than white people and what economic activities most people of color are involved in. A separate theoretical debate could be added to examine why there is such a huge racial wealth gap in this country.

### **Reference**

Oluo, I. (2019). *So you want to talk about race*. Hachette UK.