

## **WEEK ONE**

CHAPTER 1: WHITE PEOPLE ARE EXHAUSTING

CHAPTER 2: PLAYING SPADES

PAGES 11–39

1. Austin begins the book with a story about how her parents gave her the name Austin in hopes that it would help her bypass racial discrimination. What's the story behind your name? Did your parents have to consider race when you were named? If you have children, did you consider race when choosing names?
2. Though Austin was aware of race as a little girl, learning about her name was the first time she began to realize the implications of race in America. When was the first time you realized what your race means in America?
3. In chapter 1, Austin discusses how it generally feels to be the only black woman in a predominately white organization, especially one that uses phrases like "Is this person a good fit for our organization?" How do you think the language of being a "good fit" impacts racial diversity in hiring, performance reviews, and work experiences?
4. What was the racial diversity like at your elementary or middle school? Was there diversity among teachers? Administration? Was there diversity in your library? Artwork? Curriculum?
5. Have you experienced being in the racial minority? Have you experienced being in the racial majority? How were the two experiences different?
6. Have you ever been in a space where you experienced belonging (even if it was imperfect in other ways)?

## **WEEK TWO**

CHAPTER 3: THE OTHER SIDE OF HARMONY

CHAPTER 2: AIN'T NO FRIENDS HERE

PAGES 40–66

1. Austin notes that there weren't any major racial incidents when she was in high school. Were there any major racial incidents in your high school?
2. Austin first read the poem "We Wear the Mask" by Paul Laurence Dunbar in a high school English class. Have someone read "We Wear the Mask" aloud. What do you think he was trying to convey? How does this poem resonate with you?
3. How might you begin to explore what lies behind the curtain of "racial harmony" where you work, worship, or attend school?
4. Professor Crendalyn McMath was an important person in Austin's life because she was her first black teacher . . . in college! When did you have your first black teacher, supervisor, or pastor?
5. There came a major turning point in Austin's life on a college trip called Sankofa. On this trip she committed her life to pursuing racial justice when a friend of hers declared that doing nothing is no longer an option for her. When did you decide that "doing nothing is no longer an option" for you?
6. Traveling through the markers of black history greatly impacted Austin, especially her time at a lynching exhibit. How has learning the history of people of color impacted you? Has it changed your worldview? Your politics? Your theology?

### **WE WEAR THE MASK**

**BY PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR**

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties.  
Why should the world be over-wise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.  
We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
We wear the mask!

### **WEEK THREE**

CHAPTER 5: WHITENESS AT WORK

CHAPTER 6: WHITE FRAGILITY

CHAPTER 7: NICE WHITE PEOPLE

INTERLUDE: WHY I LOVE BEING A BLACK GIRL

PAGES 67–111

1. Read the selection on pages 71-76 describing one day in the professional life of a black woman. What stands out to you within this section?
2. Austin spends a little bit of time naming just a few things she loves about being a black girl. Tell the group about something you deeply appreciate about your culture?
3. In dominate culture, it can be hard for people of color to find representations of themselves. Has it been easy or difficult to find positive representations of your ethnicity/culture?
4. In chapter 6, Austin shares a couple stories about navigating the emotional fragility of white people who did not respect her authority because she is a black woman. Share an instance when you encountered white fragility. Have you ever been overcome by your own fragility? How can white fragility be resisted?
5. In chapter 7 Austin writes "Sadly, most white people are more worried about being called racist than about whether or not their actions are in fact racist or harmful." Has this been your experience?
6. Austin recounts a handful of times when white people have come to her to confess ways they've been complicit in racism. If you are white, how do you handle white guilt? If you are a person of color, what do you do when you encounter white guilt?
7. What action steps do you hope the white people in your life will begin to take to move beyond "niceness" and create real change?

## **WEEK FOUR**

CHAPTER 8: THE STORY WE TELL

INTERLUDE: HOW TO SURVIVE RACISM IN AN ORGANIZATION THAT CLAIMS TO BE ANTIRACIST

CHAPTER 9: CREATIVE ANGER

PAGES 112–130

1. Austin opens chapter 8 discussing the importance of being honest about American history. Can you share some examples of “aha moments” you’ve experienced learning about American history? Below are some examples:
  - The Middle Passage
  - Slavery
  - Black Codes
  - Trail of Tears
  - Bracero Program
  - Jim Crow
  - Internment Camps
  - Indigenous Tribes
  - Reservations
  - Chinese Exclusion Act
2. Understanding our racial history gives us context for current racial disparities. How much do you know about the racial disparities in the following systems?
  - Education
  - Home Ownership
  - Health/Health Access
  - Criminal Justice
  - Wealth
  - WagesHow can you learn more?
3. Even as we focus on learning more about the country’s history, we also should understand the history of our own communities. Do you know the racial history of your church? Denomination? School? Neighborhood? And-
4. Anger is an appropriate reaction to injustice, but Austin shares that she really struggled to become comfortable expressing that anger. How can white people do a better job of listening to the anger of people of color? How can white organizations make space to respond in supportive ways to the anger people of color express?
5. In the chapter on Creative Anger, Austin shares that she has become intimate with her anger. How does listening to the anger of people of color honor their dignity?
6. Why would Austin include a list called “How to Survive Racism in an Organization That Claims to Be Antiracist”? Why can problems at organizations committed to antiracism be difficult to name and change?

## **WEEK FIVE**

CHAPTER 10: THE RITUAL OF FEAR

CHAPTER 12: WE'RE STILL HERE

INTERLUDE: A LETTER TO MY SON

CHAPTER 11: A GOD OF THE ACCUSED

PAGES 131–164

1. In chapter 10, Austin writes about her concerns related to random police encounters. Have you experienced the fear of police encounters? What have you (or your family's) interactions with the police been like?
2. Read Mark 14-15 about Jesus's arrest, incarceration, and execution. Can you identify parallels between Jesus's experience and the black experience inside the criminal justice system?
3. In chapter 11, Austin writes about her cousin who was incarcerated. Has your life been touched by mass incarceration?
4. The Black Lives Matter movement has helped define the collective events regarding the recent killings of unarmed black people. How have the events collectively known as the Black Lives Matter Era impacted you?
5. Though Austin was incredibly joyous by the election of the first Black president, Austin wasn't convinced that America had become postracial. Were you hopeful that America had become postracial with the election of Barack Obama (even if you voted for another candidate)?
6. Because Austin was pregnant as she wrote this book, she includes a letter to her son where she talks openly about the difficulties her son may face in his future. Did your parents openly teach you about race? What did they convey and how?
7. Take fifteen minutes to write a one-page letter to a child in your life expressing how you hope America will change for the better. Share with the group if you are comfortable doing so.

## **WEEK SIX**

CHAPTER 13: JUSTICE, THEN RECONCILIATION

CHAPTER 14: STANDING IN THE SHADOW OF HOPE

PAGES 165–182

1. Austin writes that justice must precede reconciliation. What does she mean by this?
2. Do you use the term “racial reconciliation”? Why or why not?
3. How can paying attention to diversity numbers be a beginning goal, rather than an end goal for pursuing racial justice and reconciliation? How else could your organization begin to measure the health of racial justice and reconciliation?
4. Other than dialogue, how else might you pursue racial justice and reconciliation?
5. What do you do when an organization has disappointed you in their efforts to pursue racial justice or reconciliation? Where do you find healing?
6. Are you still hopeful for racial justice and reconciliation in your organization? Church? Neighborhood? The country?
7. How do you nourish hope?