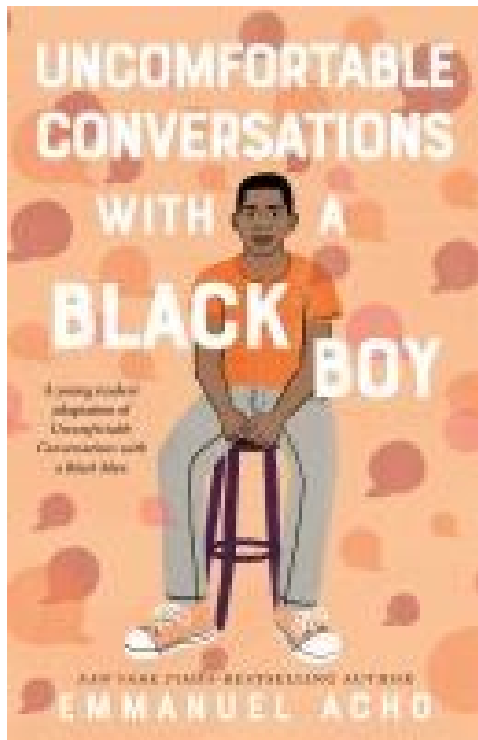


# UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS WITH A BLACK BOY



## Summary of Concerns:

This book contains controversial and inflammatory racial and social commentary.

*Juvenile*

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**2** / 5

**Teen Guidance**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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12	<p>Up here resides the people who are not visibly racist or holding on to harsh opinion about other racial groups, yet they're still a little racially insensitive, ignorant, or somewhere in between. In other words, it's usually not their intention to hurt people with their words or actions, but sometimes they do. What they don't realize is that just by living in this culture, they have become fluent in the language of racism. That's because racism has been a part of our country's culture from the very beginning- more on this later. Folks on this floor may say things like, 'I don't see color, I just see human' or 'Racism isn't a problem anymore, because Dr. King fixed all of that in the sixties.</p>
16	<p>You are going to have to learn how to move beyond being not racist, or 'seeing everybody equally,' to being anti-racist (a term that's been around for decades, but was recently made popular by scholar Ibram X. Kendi).</p>
56	<p>Not only does that overlook the difference between the experience of being black versus white in this country, 'color blindness' also provides a fertile ground for implicit biases to grow unrecognized and unchecked. If you don't see someone's skin color, then you'll never recognize when you're treating them poorly because of their race.</p>
70	<p>This country won't change in a significant way until the majority of white Americans acknowledge and address their white privilege. Let's practice. If you are white in America, that means you have white privilege. It's okay to admit this. Our country was set up that way from the beginning. So if you're white and, one day, someone says, 'Hey, I think your white privilege is showing,' don't get angry or shut down. Instead, focus on what that person might be feeling and experiencing based upon your actions. Learn when is the time to listen intently, when is the time to use your privilege- your home field advantage- as a megaphone for other people, and when is the time to step in and speak up. If white people are the problem, white people must also be part of the solution. I believe that.</p>
80	<p>Cultural appropriation happens when members of a dominant group- in the United States, white people- take elements from the culture of people who are disempowered. It's problematic for a number of reasons. For one, it trivializes historic oppression. It also lets people show love for a culture while remaining prejudiced toward the people of that culture, and lets privileged people profit from the labor of oppressed people. On top of that, it can perpetuate racist stereotypes.</p>
129	<p>If you want to know the major reason America hasn't lived up to the stated ideals of its Founding Fathers and of Mr. James Truslow Adams, it's due to a little thing called systemic racism (or structural or institutional) racism.</p> <p>I'll be the first to admit that systemic racism sounds like a conspiracy. But guess what? If there is anything in America that fits the definition of a national conspiracy, it's systemic or structural racism. Racism is a form of oppression, a.k.a. those with more power putting their thumb on those with less power. And oppression is as old as civilization. Search as far back as you like: As soon as a group of people start creating rules for themselves, as soon as they start divvying up power, customs, a government- somebody is going to get oppressed. Sooner or later, there will be systems in place to ensure that some people fare better</p>

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	<p>than others. In America, like many other countries founded on colonialism (even before we get to slavery!), the rule-makers were white, and those faring worse are black and brown people. Colonialism was the result of powerful European countries invading foreign lands and claiming those lands for themselves. They destroyed existing cultures and kingdoms, then planted new colonies and nations on top of them. All the time, the colonizers took resources from those lands and forced the original inhabitants to recognize them as their rulers. For example, North America was once home to hundreds of thousands of Native Americans; each one was a member of a native nation. When European colonizers (ahem, 'explorers') arrived on the continent, they used shady contracts, unfair laws, and violence to forcibly take land from the indigenous peoples. After the United States of America was formed and the colonial era was over, our government continued this cycle of deceit, illegal acts, and violence against native people for centuries. Spoiler alert: A lot of those systems are still chugging along today.</p>
132	<p>For starters, a definition: systemic racism is ever dynamic- historic, cultural, political, economic, institutional, and person-to-person- that gives advantages to white people, while at the same time producing a whole host of terrible effects for black people and other people of color. Those effects show up as inequalities in every part of our lives and in how we are treated by those in power. In criminal justice, black people are jailed at five times the rate of white people. In terms of power, there have been forty-six different presidents, and only one of them (President Barack Obama!) was not a white guy. And up until January of 2021 and the election of Kamala Harris, all of the vice presidents were white, too. And if that wasn't convincing enough, there have only been four black governors and ten black senators in the two-hundred-plus-year history of our nation's Congress. Which is to say systemic racism is making the unequal treatment of people of color the national norm.</p> <p>I could spend the rest of this book detailing different parts of structural racism, but for now, I'll take on a few major areas: housing, schooling, and criminal justice. The racism ingrained in each of these areas of life perpetuates a vicious cycle in which certain groups, including black folks, are held down while other groups- namely, white folks- are elevated.</p>
143	<p>Systemic racism is hard to talk about because it seems so big, so pervasive. And it is. I've touched on a few of the places it rears it's head, but the truth is that it pervades almost all areas of American life, and it's even harder to figure out what role an individual white person plays in the system.</p>
152	<p>When I say that reverse racism is a myth, what I mean is that, while individual black people can be prejudiced against white people, reverse racism by black people against white people just doesn't exist. It can't exist, because that's not how collective power works in this country. In other words, in order to act, as a group, upon racist beliefs, you must have power over the group you want to oppress. Black people do not hold power over white people in this country. They never have. No group in America holds power over white people.</p> <p>What is reverse racism, if it's not, well, real? It's a prime example of what a scholar Alice McIntyre calls white talk: a.k.a. strategies white people use- consciously or not- to insulate themselves from their collective participation in</p>

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	<p>racism. Another way into this idea is the term white fragility, recently popularized by sociologis Robin DiAngelo. When white people are put in situations that make them uncomfortable and challenge their identity, 'we withdraw, defend, cry, argue, minimize, ignor,' explains DiAngelo. 'And in other ways push back to regain our racial position and equilibrium.' Put very simply- white folks get defensive. The feeling of defensiveness is white fragility, and the way they hit back, with accusations like reverse racism, is white talk.</p>
154	<p>I repeat: There is no such thing as reverse racism. If you want to oppress someone, you're gonna need power over them as a group- and no group holds it over white people. There literally aren't enough black people with institutional authority over white people in America to facilitate systemic racism against them.</p>
161	<p>For similar reasons, it's insensitive to say, 'All lives matter,' when someone says, 'Black Lives Matter.' White lives have never been in danger from black lives to the degree that black lives have been endangered by white people and whiteness- and that's on an individual level and a systemic level.</p>
165	<p>It will take courage, empathy, and commitment to challenge those who rely on white talk. If your goal is to fight racism, to help foster and America that isn't built on white privilege, then you'll have to do your part.</p>