

JOHN LEWIS: GOOD TROUBLE

RACIAL JUSTICE AND VOTING RIGHTS DISCUSSION GUIDE



*"But we must accept one central truth and responsibility as participants in a democracy: **Freedom is not a state; it is an act.** It is not some enchanted garden perched high on a distant plateau where we can finally sit down and rest. Freedom is the continuous action we all must take, and each generation must do its part to create an even more fair, more just society."*

— Representative John Lewis

THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE is meant to help Private Screening Experience organizers create space to have a conversation on racial justice and democracy in the United States of America. Voter suppression is a form of systemic racism. Talking about race and equity can be difficult, but that shouldn't stop us from having the conversation. And while this conversation is an important first step, it does not absolve us of our individual and collective responsibility to do better. Instead, it is a starting point to acknowledge our history, discuss ways to begin a journey in becoming anti-racist, and surface ideas for how we can proactively work to create a more fair and just society together.

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WAYS WE CREATE A MORE FAIR AND JUST SOCIETY IS ENSURING EVERYONE HAS EQUITABLE ACCESS TO OUR ELECTIONS.

STARTING THE DISCUSSION:

- In advance of the discussion, email the Discussion Guidelines and Rep. John Lewis' quote.
- Introduce yourself and your role.
- Read aloud the Discussion Guidelines and nominate a participant in the group to monitor the conversation to ensure everyone follows them.
- Have each person introduce themselves by name and self-identify their race, ethnicity, and gender pronouns.
- Read aloud the definition of "Race" as it pertains to this discussion: Race is a social construct based on perceptions of a person's skin color, hair texture and other physical characteristics. In the words of historian Nell Irvin Painter, "race is an idea, not a fact." Race is different from a person's nationality (e.g. Irish, Italian) and their ethnicity (e.g. Jewish, Latinx).

JOHN LEWIS: GOOD TROUBLE

RACIAL JUSTICE AND VOTING RIGHTS DISCUSSION GUIDE

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES:

- **APPRECIATE** that everyone in the room has good intentions and also biases. Everyone is doing the best they can from their current state of awareness.
- **SPEAK** for yourself ("I feel..." "I think..."), not on behalf of your identity ("we feel..." "we are...") or other identities ("they think..." "they act like...").
- **LISTEN** to understand and not to respond. Take the time to process what you've heard.
- **AVOID** negative judgments, language, attacks, and name calling.
- **BE OPEN** to feeling uncomfortable - all growth comes with some discomfort.
- **UNDERSTAND** that groups of a single race can have multiple perspectives and even the most diverse groups will not represent every perspective that could be held by that group.
- **STAY ENGAGED.** Take a moment if you feel frustrated or misunderstood, but don't drop out.
- **GIVE** those who are taking a moment to gather their thoughts the space to do so; respect each participant's space to reflect before they speak.
- **DON'T** dominate the conversation. Everyone gets a chance to speak and be heard.
- **DON'T** expect resolution, complete agreement, or definite answers. This is a discussion, not a debate or a lesson.

QUESTIONS

ANALYZE

- What did you learn about Congressman Lewis that you did not know prior to watching the film?
- What part of the quote above most resonates with you and why?
- Before the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed, literacy tests and other methods of voter suppression were used to prevent black people and other people of color from voting. Reflecting on today's laws and accepted norms, are there policies that you feel are unjust or inequitable? Why?
- How do you observe issues of race and racism playing out in the current electoral process?
- Why is it important to guarantee the right to vote for all citizens?

STATISTICS TO CONSIDER

- Black and Latinx voters wait, on average, 45% longer than white voters. — [Brennan Center](#)
- Over 1600 polling places have been closed since the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in 2013. By far, the most common justification for closing polling places was no justification at all - [Leadership Conference Education Fund](#)
- Only 40% of polling places fully accommodate people with disabilities. — [ACLU](#)
- Some Native Americans have to travel 150 miles one-way to get to a poll. — [The Guardian](#)

JOHN LEWIS: GOOD TROUBLE

RACIAL JUSTICE AND VOTING RIGHTS DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT:

- Describe the racial demographics of your community, for example where you live and where you grew up. How has race impacted or intersected with your daily lived experience in those contexts?
- Reflect on your experiences voting in different elections. Have you ever faced any obstacles to accessing the ballot? If so, feel free to share your voting story.
- Who in your life was a good trouble maker? In what way?
- Has this documentary expanded your perspective on racial justice and democracy in the United States? If so, in what way?
- Would you consider your community to be quiet or vocal when it comes to issues of racial justice? What do you think this demonstrates about your community? How can you work to advance issues of racial justice in your community and create change?

RESOURCES

ARTICLES:

- ["Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true."](#) by Nicole Hannah Jones, The 1619 Project, *The New York Times Magazine*
- ["How Did We Get Here?"](#) by Gillian B. White, *The Atlantic*
- ["Speaking Up Against Discrimination and Racism in the Workplace"](#) by Chris Westfall, *Forbes*
- ["Mail-in Voting will suppress Native Americans' in November,"](#) by Thea Sebastian, *The Guardian*

BOOKS:

- "White Fragility" by Robin DiAngelo
- "How to be an Antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi
- "Between the World and Me" by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- "The New Jim Crow" by Michelle Alexander

REPORTS:

- ["Waiting to Vote,"](#) Brennan Center for Justice
- ["Democracy Diverted: Polling Place Closures and the Right to Vote,"](#) Leadership Conference Educational Fund

VOTER SUPPRESSION INFORMATION:

- [Brennan Center for Justice](#)
- [American Civil Liberties Union](#)

