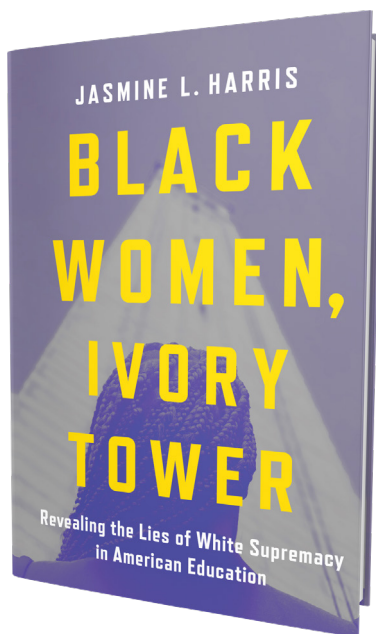


BLACK WOMEN, IVORY TOWER

DISCUSSION GUIDE



BLACK WOMEN, IVORY TOWER

Revealing the Lies of White Supremacy in American Education

BY JASMINE L. HARRIS

Black women are heading to college in record numbers, and more and more Black women are teaching in higher education. But these statistics don't guarantee our safety there. Willpower and grit may improve achievement for Black people in school, but they don't secure our belonging. In fact, the very structure of higher education ensures that we're treated as guests, outsiders to the institutional family—outnumbered and unwelcome.

Dr. Jasmine Harris shares her own experiences attempting to be a Vassar girl and reckoning with a lack of legacy and agency. Moving beyond the statistics, Dr. Harris examines the day-to-day impacts on Black women as individuals, the longer-term consequences to our professional lives, and the generational costs to our entire families.

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOR CLASSROOM USE

1. Dr. Harris traces institutional racism at school to the very beginnings of public education in the US. How important is it to consider the long history of education when examining differing outcomes (social, economic, physical) in Black and white communities?
2. What stories have you heard in your courses about people who look like you? Were the stories positive or negative?
3. More than 40,000 Black teachers were removed from the workforce during school integration, with long-standing effects. Have you ever had a Black teacher? If so, when? How do you think having a Black teacher impacted your learning (both in class and outside of it)?
4. If someone asks you to describe the “typical” college student, what physical, social, and economic traits do they have? Where did you learn what a “typical” college student is?
5. What is one thing you do to perform belonging at school? How does that performance help you “fit in”? Who does it leave out?
6. How physically safe do you feel on campus? What kinds of “bodywork” do you engage in to try to manufacture physical safety?
7. How has your class identity (and that of your family) impacted the schools you’ve attended? What impact do you think school attendance will have on your class identity in the future?
8. What about your education journey do you have faith in? How might that be different for other students?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

1. Dr. Harris traces institutional racism at school to the very beginnings of American education more than three hundred years ago. How does the long history of higher education impact classroom dynamics between Black and white students?
2. Whose stories are getting told in your classrooms? How might that impact student learning across racial groups?
3. Your students have likely not had many Black teachers. How does that knowledge impact your pedagogy? What impact could it have on their classroom participation and course outcomes?
4. How is your perception of individual students impacted by their race and gender, and your presumptions about their class, religion, etc.? What impacts do these perceptions have on your interactions with students?
5. Does your pedagogy allow for diverse opportunities for belonging among students? How might you adjust your pedagogy to create more inclusiveness in your classrooms?
6. Dr. Harris describes an acute awareness of her physical body in school. What kinds of “bodywork” do students have to do to belong in your classrooms?
7. How do expected or assumed class identities impact your pedagogical approach? Would your pedagogy change at school with different assumed identities?
8. What are you doing to keep non-white students supported and engaged in your classrooms? What more can you do? What hopes do you have for improving Black students’ experiences in your courses?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOR BLACK WOMEN STUDENTS

1. Dr. Harris talks about her difficulty feeling personally connected to the college she attended. Have you ever experienced feelings of non-belonging on campus? How do you think this impacts your life as a college student?
2. Diseducation is the process of disassociating Black people from the traditional structures and cultures of American education. What aspects of disconnection do you see among Black students on campus? What stories have you heard from your family about being in school?
3. School integration was meant to improve the experiences of Black students. How successful do you think the Brown v. Board of Education ruling was, seventy years later? How many Black teachers have you had? Do you think this has had an impact on your learning?
4. How aware are you of your racial identity at school? What experiences impact that awareness?
5. What things have you done to try to fit in at school? How do you know what the “right” performance is in this context?
6. Do you feel safe on campus? If there are specific spaces where you feel or don’t feel safe, what differences exist across those spaces that impact your perception of safety?
7. What is the value of higher education for you (financial or otherwise)? Do you think college is “worth it” today?
8. Do you feel hopeful about the opportunity for changes in higher education to improve Black students’ experiences? Why or why not?