



Is Affirmative Action Still Needed?

| *Discovering the pros and cons of continuing affirmative action.*

Goal for the Session

Participants will discuss and judge the purpose, necessity, relevance, and benefits of affirmative action. Participants will further determine if the intended goals of affirmative action have been reached.

Preparing for the Session

- This study is part of the Racism Study Pack. Your group may use this study alone, although we suggest you use it along with the other studies in the pack.
- The following is the suggested order of the study pack, although you may study in any order your group chooses.
 - Why Is It so Difficult to Talk about Racism?
 - Racism 101
 - The Bible and Racism
 - A History of Racism in the United States
 - White Privilege
 - Is Affirmative Action Still Needed?
 - Do Segregated Churches Imply Racism?
- Carefully read over the Participant Handout and the Leader's Guide not only to understand the issue but also to determine where you stand concerning affirmative action so that you may remain as neutral as possible when facilitating the session.

Session at a Glance

OPENING

- Prayer
- Review

ENGAGING

- Tracing the history
- Debate
- Debriefing the debate

RESPONDING

- What now?

CLOSING

- Closing litany

- Pray for yourself as well as the participants.
- It is always ideal to distribute the Participant Handout prior to the session so that participants can read it before discussion in a group. You may e-mail it as an attachment to group members or make copies and distribute them the week before. Always have extra copies available for newcomers.
- For suggestions about how to use this study with various groups of people, see the appendix at the end of this Leader's Guide.

Materials Needed

- Pen/pencil
- Newsprint
- Marker
- Note cards
- Participant Handout

Teaching Tip

Some participants may be reluctant to fully take part for fear of voicing the wrong opinion, especially if your group has studied all the other pieces of the study pack. Remind participants that affirmative action is a complicated issue. There are people on both sides of the issue who would consider themselves actively involved in combating racism. Therefore, everyone is welcomed and encouraged to voice their opinion.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer

Pray the following prayer or one of your own choosing.

Gracious God, for the challenge of the journey taken thus far we are grateful. Help us to be grounded and settled in your truth. Continue to reveal to us that which is truth and confirm what we know to be truth. In your name. **Amen.**

2. Review

If you are using this session as a continuation of the Racism Study Pack, quickly review the definition of white privilege and establish that you will be working from the understanding that white privilege is the standard in the United States. If you are using this session independently, define the term “white privilege.” You may use the definition below, but it is encouraged that you use this session in tandem with the session on white privilege. One definition is not comprehensive enough to understand the gravity of the situation.

White privilege is used to refer to the unearned advantages that are enjoyed by white people in the United States. For example: Whites are seen as the standard or norm. Whites have the majority of power and are seldom referred to by their race.

Exploring (30 minutes)

3. Tracing the History

Create a time line on a piece of newsprint as you discuss each significant event. You may choose to replicate the one below or use one of your own choosing.

- 1862 Emancipation Proclamation
- 1865 13th Amendment—Abolishment of Slavery
- 1868 14th Amendment—Citizenship Rights
- 1870 15th Amendment—“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”
- 1941 Roosevelt’s Executive Order
- 1953 Bureau of Employment Security Redirected
- 1961 Civil Rights Act
- 1964 JFK’s Executive Order

Guide participants to understand the significant role of government in ensuring the rights of its citizens.

4. Debate

Divide the participants into two groups. One group will formulate an argument against affirmative action and the other group will argue for affirmative action. Each group will have ten minutes to read the Participant Handout and come up with its arguments. Invite each group to select a spokesperson and a scribe. The group that is for affirmative action will speak first, followed by the group that is against affirmative action. Explain that the purpose of this exercise is to understand the complexities of the issue and not to see who can win the argument. Some people may be in the group they do not agree with. That’s fine.

Below are some questions they may wish to consider as they formulate their argument. You may choose to supply these questions on a separate sheet of paper or write them on a piece of newsprint or whiteboard that is visible to all of the participants. Hand out note cards to each group to use for notes during their argument.

- What is the primary basis of the argument for and against affirmative action?

- What damage or benefit has come out of affirmative action?
- What is the impact of affirmative action on society?
- Why is affirmative action unnecessary or necessary today?
- Are there solutions that address the problem of inequality more effectively than affirmative action? If so, what are they?
- How does your faith as a Christian impact your opinion?

After ten minutes, invite the groups back together and have them present their arguments.

5. Debriefing the Debate

Invite participants to share new insights or questions that were generated from the debate.

Responding (5 minutes)

6. What Now?

If the majority of your participants do not agree with affirmative action, invite them to come up with an alternative plan that would address the inequalities in the United States.

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Closing Litany

Leader: O God, you alone are good and holy.

All: Your love is everlasting.

Leader: Come, let us praise God for the richness of creation.

All: Thank you, God.

Leader: For rich cultures and creative spirits.

All: Thank you, God.

Leader: For the church into which we have been called.

All: Thank you, God.

Leader: Most of all for your love shown through Jesus Christ.

All: We thank and praise you for your goodness to us.

Leader: Give thanks to the Lord, who is good.

All: God's love endures forever. Amen.

Teaching Alternatives

- Invite participants to share their own experiences with affirmative action, whether positive or negative. Use these experiences to discuss the purpose of affirmative action.
- Create a pro and con list concerning affirmative action in lieu of a debate.

About the Writer

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Additional Teaching Tips for Various Types of Groups

Leading a session on racism is ideally accomplished with a diverse group of participants representing a variety of heritages. But unfortunately this is not always possible or realistic. Given these circumstances we have provided tips for facilitating these sessions in a fruitful manner.

General Guidelines

- Remind participants that these sessions are a starting point. The work to challenge racism is ongoing. Remind yourself that conversations dealing with racism are difficult and uncomfortable. This is normal.
- All voices need to be heard and respected. Be mindful that no one is targeted for their views. Encourage everyone to listen to each other and the writers of the sessions without being defensive.
- Be mindful that the conversation stays on topic with time to share experience, analysis, and hopes for the future.
- Identify your own struggles with race and racism in order to check any negative assumptions or stereotypes you may have.

All-White Congregations

- Be alert that the conversation stays on topic and does not downplay the effect of racism.
- An all-white conversation may provide a forum for an honest expression of views. Issues of white guilt and denial are normal if the discussion is fruitful. Address these issues and avoid the tendency to downplay or ignore them.
- Racism cannot be and is not an issue only for people of color. Encourage participants to take ownership.

Primarily White Group with a Few People of Color

- Be alert to statements or questions that ask the person of color to make a sweeping generalization for all people of color. For example: What do people of color need or want?
- Racism must be challenged together by people of color and white people. Watch for manifestations of white guilt in the form of denial.
- If possible, have two facilitators, one white and one person of color.
- This group makeup can be tricky because the power dynamic so closely mirrors what people of color experience in many aspects of their lives. Be mindful that the people of color in the room don't feel pressured to "educate" the white participants about race or racism. Also, make sure that the experiences of the people of color don't get sidetracked, downplayed, or explained away even if there is disagreement in the room.

Primarily People of Color with a Few White People

- The white participants may feel unable to express themselves openly, resulting in a lack of honesty. Be careful to keep the conversation from becoming accusatory.
- If possible, have two facilitators, one white and one person of color.

Group with All People of Color

- Facilitator must be a person of color for honest exchange.
- Not all people of color will agree about what the definitions or implications of racism are in society or in their lives, so don't assume opinions or feel the need to force consensus. Instead, call participants to a spirit of support amid different experiences, creative collaboration, and coalition building.