

## Rap Sessions Study Guide

### America, a Post-Racial Society?

*By: Daniel White Hodge*

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Is the U.S. really a post-racial society? During the 2008 presidential primary, the word “post-racial” emerged as a watchword to describe one of the leading candidates and by extension an entire generation of young people. However, what does it mean to be post-racial in the hip-hop generation? Hip-hop, the youth culture of our time, has become synonymous with race even as it appeals to global cultures. Likewise, have we truly arrived at a post-racial era when the n-word is daily prevalent in hip-hop lyrics and culture?

“Is America Really Post-Racial?” is a town hall meeting that attempts to answer the important question, “can the n-word and post racism co-exist?” The post civil rights generation is America’s most global and heterogeneous ever. At the same time, as the historically weighted n-word suggests, we still struggle with our country’s unreconciled racial history.

Earlier this year, presidential candidate Barack Obama called for a national discussion on race to address some of these concerns. This community dialogue on America & post-racial issues, answers the call. Presented in Rap Sessions traditional town hall meeting format, this highly interactive 90-minute forum is headlined by leading Hip Hop activists, scholars, and artists. It is a timely, provocative gathering that will challenge students to consider many of the issues that arise regarding race, ethnicity, class, gender, and injustice. This study guide is designed to aid in deepening the discussion.

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This study guide seeks to go deeper into the issues of America being a post-racial society. The study questions here are listed to continue the conversation that was started during the Rap Sessions forum. This study guide works best when done in a group or community setting. The community based learning format is preferred because we tend to learn more when others share, interact, and engage with our thoughts and opinions. We recommend you go deeper as a group on this particular subject. [Start here](#) and view the Rap Sessions *Digital Stories*, which will also help direct you through this study guide and will assist in recalling key statements from Rap Session panelists.

#### **For Starters...**

Let us begin with some opening questions & dialogue regarding the issue of post-racial America:

- Has America entered a post-racial era?
  - o If so, what are the challenges of race in such a time?
  - o If not, where does America stand on the issues of race?
- Since the election of president Obama, there has been conversation that racism has begun its last mile. Do you find that to be true or is racism worse now than it was during the 1960's?
- Does Obama's election to the highest office in the nation make "life" easier for people of color? If so, explain how, and if not, explain how come.

Now, take some time to digest what you/ your group has come up with and dialogue a little more regarding the issue of post-racial America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Ok, at this point, break into groups of three, if you have the numbers; if not simply pair up with someone. Begin to list out all of the stereotypes and negative images regarding these people groups:

- African Americans
- Latinos
- Poor Euro-Americans
- Asians
- Middle Easterners
- Pacific Islanders
- Gays

Assign someone as a scribe, and write down every stereotype and negative image regarding each of those groups listed above. Be as open as possible without being disrespectful and or mean. Once you have made your way down the list, gather once again as a group.

Now, if anyone from those people groups is present, have them read their listed stereotypes. If there is no one represented from those people groups, simple have different people read the list off.

- What did you think about this?
  - o Were some of these stereotypes true?
  - o What makes them true?
- Where do those thoughts, images, worldviews, and ideologies regarding these people groups originate?
- How do media, religion, family, friends, and schooling play a part in shaping these thoughts & images?
- How have we, as a nation, moved forward in overcoming these stereotypes, if at all? Explain what you mean.

### Probing Deeper...

What about language in a post-racial America? How might language affect the way a person feels about a post-racial society? The N-word (Nigger or Nigga) has become a heated debate over free speech & racial respect. To begin:

- What are your thoughts regarding the N-word?
- What are the cultural and political roots of the n-word, and is it still relevant?
- What about Tupac's acronym of the word for Nigga: Never Ignorant Getting' Goals Accomplished? How does that affect this discussion?
- Who can and should use the N-word, and when is it appropriate?
  - o In other words, can only Black people say the word?
  - o Rap artists? Which ones?
  - o Can White rap artists like Eminem use the word? If so, in what context? If not, why?

Take a look at Dave Chappelle's skit on the Nigger Family ([Click here](#))

- Initial thoughts?
- How does Dave play with the word?
- Does it seem "less offensive" when placed in a comedic context?
- What makes the skit funny? If at all?

The N-word comes with a history behind it. What about other derogatory racial words? Do other derogatory racial words get used the same way as the N-word? Words such as:

- Kike
- Spic
- Beaner
- Chink
- Jap
- Gook
- Cracker
- Honkey
- Sand Monkey
- Towel Head
- In-juns

Do we hear these words in everyday music, speech, comedic skits? As a group, discuss the reasons why the N-word is such a useable word for many. Also, discuss why you think these other words do not show up in many rap songs, comedy skits, and or media outlets.

### A step deeper...

In 2006 Michael Richards, Kramer from the television show *Seinfeld* went into a racial rant while on stage at Los Angeles famous Laugh Factory. The entire thing was recorded; you can watch that right now.... ([Click Here](#))

- What makes Richards feel he can use the N-word so openly?
- Was this always festering in Richards? If not, how was his reference to lynching just an “anger moment?”
- Richards later recanted his actions, you can see that here...([Click Here](#))
- Does that make things better? Why not?
- How do three White men talking about this possibly make things worse?
- What are the socio-historical elements surrounding the N-word taking place in this dynamic?
- Does Richards appear to understand the severity of what happened?
- How does this open up the door for the use of the N-Word?
  - o Should rap artists then apologize for the use of the word?
  - o Once again, who can use the word and in what context?

In 2007, radio personality Don Imus was also caught on tape refereeing to the Rutgers Women’s basketball team as “Nappy headed hoe’s”...check that out right here ([Click Here](#))

- What are the racial politics at work here?
- The ensuing rebuttal from many White Americans was that Don was no different from any rap artists who use the same words....is that true? Explain what you mean.
- Should rap artists censor their use of the word Bitch, Ho, Slut in reference to Black women? Explain how this might be different.
- What is the deeper subtext of Imus’ comments regarding Black women and sexuality? How has the image of the Black woman been seen throughout the media in America’s post-racial society?
- What indicators are there, with both Richards and Imus’ comments, that there are more complex problems at work in the U.S. in regards to race/ethnicity?

Some broader questions to consider for discussion:

- How do popular culture representations from Hip Hop lyrics to comedians like Dave Chappelle, and TV programming like *The Boondocks* complicate these issues? ([Check a Boondocks Episode out here](#))
- What responsibilities do activists, politicians, and educators bear in advancing our national discussion on race?

- What can student activists do to move racial representations and dialogue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

America is at a crossroads on many issues: gay marriage, the right for a woman to choose, handling “terrorism,” racial & ethnic lines, and the complex matrix of free speech. Post-racial awareness is at a high, yet, we all have the tough and tedious task of unraveling the web and historical knots of racism that exist in the DNA of this country. Until we deal with the root of the problem—savage historical racial inequalities—then we will remain at the crossroads of race & ethnicity.

### For Further Reading:

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Daniel White Hodge is a dynamic speaker, scholar, Hip Hop theologian, Tupac Shakur scholar, & racial bridge builder that connects Urban Popular culture (Including but not limited to Hip Hop, Race/ Ethnicity, class, socio-cultural concerns, The Black Church, & The Emergent Urban Church) with daily life events. Having received his PhD from Fuller Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, his dissertation focused on the life, theology, and spiritual message of Tupac Amaru Shakur (TITLE: Baptized in Dirty Water: The Missiological Gospel of Tupac Amaru Shakur). Dan has been an active member of the Hip Hop Community since he was in first grade, and continues to not only study the culture, but live it as well. His unique perspective on Hip Hop and Theology challenges his audiences to look beyond the "outer surface" and go into the deeper parts of the culture.

Dr. White Hodge's is the author of: *The Soul Of Hip Hop: Rims, Tims, & A Cultural Theology* (2010 IVP Press) & *Heaven Has A Ghetto: The Missiological Gospel & Theology of Tupac Amaru Shakur* (2009 VDM Academic)

Go deeper in the conversation by visiting Dan's website: [www.whitehodge.com](http://www.whitehodge.com)