

The Life of Anne Braden:
Discussion Questions for White Antiracists

Childhood: *Are there elements of Anne Braden's childhood you can relate to? What are your own earliest memories of race? Do you have childhood memories of racial paternalism or White silence?*

Teenage & College Years: *What impacted your experience and understanding of race in your teenage and young adult years? How was this gendered in your experience?*

Mentorship: *Mentors played an important role in Braden's life, starting with Harriet Fitzgerald. What lessons does their relationship have for successful White antiracist work? Who have been the people in your life who have helped you down the antiracist path, and what did they do to support you? What would it look like in your life right now to have – or be – an antiracist mentor?*

Personal Impact of Black & Brown People: *How have connections with Black & Brown people impacted your antiracist growth? Were there specific moments that seemed pivotal, as in Braden's life when she talked with the Black woman in New York?*

Spirituality: *What are moments in your life when you've experienced your own White fragility, racial ignorance, or racial biases as holding you down spiritually, emotionally, or ethically? What are some moments of antiracist growth that allowed you to feel more spiritually or ethically expansive?*

Moving from Consciousness to Action: *By the time Braden left college, she had developed an antiracist consciousness... but did not know how to take action. What has been your own history of moving from consciousness to action? What do you think motivates or supports White people to move from consciousness to action?*

The Potential Loneliness of White Antiracism: *After college, Braden felt alone in her evolving antiracist beliefs and became depressed. Have you had to wrestle with something similar? How do we support White people experiencing this?*

The Personal Impact of Being of Witness: *As a journalist in Birmingham, Braden came into direct contact with violent White supremacy for the first time, which deepened her antiracist commitment considerably. What is your own history with being closer to – or farther away – from being a witness to the direct impact of White supremacy? How has that history impacted your antiracist development?*

Class: *Carl Braden introduced Anne to class analysis. How has your own class background influenced the way you've perceived race and racial justice? What is your understanding of the intersection of racial and class inequality?*

Honest Interracial Conversations: It was in the context of interracial union organizing that Braden first experienced Black people speaking frankly with Whites... including pushing back on their racism. This led her to realize that her previous interactions with Black people had been inauthentic. *What are your own experiences – or lack of them – with frank and authentic interracial conversations, and how have they impacted you?*

Our Antiracist Development: Braden’s life had a number of steps leading to a deep commitment to antiracism, including opportunities for mentorship, studying and witnessing racial oppression as a journalist, and building authentic friendships with Black people as an organizer. Each of these steps brought her emotionally closer to the problem of White supremacy, and as she became closer her commitment deepened. *What is your own history of becoming emotionally closer to the suffering caused by White supremacy? If you could imagine taking a further step closer, what would that look like? How would it feel?*

Our Work: As Braden’s antiracist commitment deepened, she decided that journalism wasn’t the greatest thing she could offer, and sought ways to become a full time organizer. *What is the relationship between your work and social justice? What would you like it to be?*

Organizing White People: While working with the Civil Rights Congress, the Black radical activist William Patterson told Braden that her efforts would be best spent figuring out how to support antiracist growth amongst White people. *What is your own understanding of the importance of White antiracist development, and how to broaden and strengthen it?*

Facing Our Stake in White Supremacy: When Anne and Carl Braden purchased the house for Andrew Wade, a group of angry White men confronted them. They were concerned about their property values and social standing declining because a Black person had moved to their neighborhood. When the Bradens reached out to pastors for support, the pastors worried they would lose their congregations if they supported integration. *Have you ever felt that you could lose something – like social standing or economic comfort – by standing up for racial justice? If not, could you imagine a scenario in which you might feel it, especially as a result of deepening your antiracist commitment? How can we support White people when they are concerned that racial justice, or stepping more fully into antiracist work, will erode their “privilege”?*

Discussion Questions for Part Two: A Life in the Movement

Identifying and Networking White Antiracists: In the early days of the civil rights movement, Braden joined an organization dedicated to building White Southern support for integration. She became a “travelling agitator,” searching for

sympathetic White people and helping them step forward in a hostile environment. She created mailing lists and hosted events to help to network them and introduce them to local Black leadership. *What is the importance of discovering and supporting White antiracists in more conservative areas today? How do we do that work of discovery and support?*

White Antiracist Elders: Even though Braden's White antiracist elders were often more conservative than she was, she sought them out and learned a great deal from them. *What is your vision of the role of White antiracist elders in your own future development? What impact have they had in your own life? How can we support our antiracist elders? Also: How can we lift up the voices of antiracist ancestors?*

Building Up Connections With, and Raising Up the Voices of Local Black Leadership: As the editor of the *Southern Patriot*, Braden paid close attention to local movements around the country, interviewed local Black leadership, and used the *Patriot* to elevate their voices. *How are you – or antiracist organizations you work with – strengthening connections with local leaders of color and elevating their voices?*

Highlighting Excellent White Antiracist Work: Braden made an effort to lift up stories of White antiracist work in the South, with an understanding that those stories energized White antiracist growth and helped to clarify effective antiracist action for other White people. *What kinds of stories can we tell about White antiracism that can strengthen the work, make it more effective, inspire people, and bring more people in?*

The Small Things That Deepen Relationships: When Martin Luther King needed a ride, Braden gave him one, and they developed a friendship through their conversation on the road. Braden invited her friend Ella Baker to sip whiskey in the woods and decompress. *What are the “small things” in your life that have helped to deepen or create movement relationships, or that you feel would deepen antiracist camaraderie more generally?*

Skill Sharing: During the first year of SNCC, the Bradens supported the students by sharing their significant skills in media outreach and fundraising. *What skills and resources do you possess that you could share with other antiracists, and especially with youth or newcomers to movement building?*

“You can't organize people if you don't like them.”: Braden felt that many of the White self-identified radicals in the movement disliked and struggled to relate to many White people, especially if they were rural, poor, Southern, or conservative. *What is your own history of relating to different types of White people? What can we – and our organizations – do to ensure that we build positive relationships with poor, rural, and Southern White people? What else can we do to help organize these groups? If we have personal judgments of these groups, how can we overcome them?*