

Beyond Prejudice



Think and share

1. What is prejudice? Have you ever seen or encountered it? Discuss examples of prejudice.
2. In English we say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." What does this mean? And is it true?
3. Is it possible to hurt people's feelings without meaning to? What is a good way of dealing with hurt feelings, your own and other people's?
4. Like other tools, words can wear out. Have you ever chosen to stop using a word? Why?

In this chapter you will ...

- read the minutes of an emergency-meeting discussion
- practice vocabulary related to social issues
- write and speak about prejudice and different groups in society
- listen to stories about prejudice in the US
- learn about debating
- write and perform a debate-play

Retire the Crow

Minutes of Emergency Meeting, Buckeye State University, USA

Topic of Meeting: BSU's sports mascot, the Crow

Present at meeting: President of the University, Head of Athletics Department, Head of Student Health, Speaker of Student Senate, and Department Secretary

Secretary: Meeting is called — please take a seat — meeting is called to order. We've been called here today — quiet please! — to discuss our school mascot the Crow. I believe we can all hear student protesters chanting outside at this very moment ...

Protesters: Change the name, clean up our game! That racist crow has got to go!

Secretary: ... protesters saying the mascot is racist and should be replaced. So, we have called this emergency meeting today to discuss the Crow. To be or not to be, uh, retired and replaced. Due to ongoing criticisms of the Crow being a symbol of prejudice. President Ambar? Anything else before we begin?

President: Thank you. Just one thing. Let me be clear, everyone, that changing mascots is not something we can do in an afternoon. Changes of this type are difficult and expensive. But we're here today to discuss the possibility. Speaker of the Student Senate, as the only student present in this room today, you may be first to address the meeting.

Speaker of Student Senate: Thank you, President Ambar. As we all know, traditions are important. So is evolving with the times. Prejudice is not an easy word. Literally it means "pre-judge", to put people on trial in our minds before even meeting them. Prejudice and racism are often the twins of ignorance and cruelty. Now to have the racist stereotype of Jim Crow as our mascot —



Head of Athletics: Point of order. It hasn't been Jim Crow in decades.

Speaker of Student Senate: — As I was saying. To have a mascot called the Crow, which is a big charcoal-colored bird that looks oddly like a Jim-Crow-era caricature of a Black man —

Head of Athletics: Because crows are black? So are blackbirds.

Speaker of Student Senate: — As we know, until 1984 the BSU Crow had big red lips and googly white eyes. Which real crows, genus species *corvus corvus*, do not. And up until 1968, Jim Crow was the name of race laws in the Southern US that enforced segregation. For anyone who needs a reminder, Jim Crow laws meant separate and unequal schools, parks, drinking fountains, public restrooms, seats on the bus, separate everything. The practice of red-lining meant that official maps included red outlines of neighborhoods Blacks were, and were not, allowed to buy houses. The Crow still looks oddly like a Black person, and the words "Jim Crow" represent historical American apartheid at its worst.

Secretary: Thank you. But, please, we all know the history. We're here to talk mascots.

Speaker of Student Senate: Exactly, that's exactly what I am talking about. Words, mascots, these all are symbols. They reflect — and shape — attitudes. And attitudes shape society. Nearly every major student association at this school is for changing the mascot: the Black Students Association, Asian Students Association, Campus Women's Association, the Campus Pride Association, the list goes on. Black students make up only six percent of the student body, yet a full eighty percent of the football team is Black. And what our student athletes do is hard enough without feeling bad about their own uniforms. Without facing prejudice on and off the field, from their own school.

President: Prejudice? Remember, we have strict policies against actual prejudice. This university treats everyone equally, and we are proud of every single student.

Head of Student Health: Based on the higher levels of stress and depression amongst minority students, it would seem they don't always feel treated equally.

Secretary: Please, people. We're getting away from the question. The mascot. What does the Athletics Department say? Prejudice, or proud tradition?

Head of Athletics: In the Athletics Department we are proud to work at Buckeye State. Proud of our student athletes, proud of our history, proud of our long tradition of sports.

Speaker of Student Senate: Proud of our mascot?

Head of Athletics: As you can see, like you, I am also Black, and I will be proud of our student athletes whatever our mascot is.

Speaker of Student Senate: You might be proud of your athletes, but you're avoiding the question.

Secretary: Order, please.

Head of Athletics: I know about prejudice. It's yet another handicap, another barrier — and yes, another type of injury apart from the physical ones that happen on the playing field. But prejudice is harder, oh so much harder, to heal. I know. My grandfather told me about Jesse Owens at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Jesse Owens, who won



four gold medals in track and field, a Black man in Nazi Germany, a brilliant national hero celebrated to this day —

Speaker of Student Senate: Excuse me, with all due respect to a hometown hero, we're not talking about the 1930s, we're talking about now.

Head of Athletics: — and yet when Jesse Owens came home to Ohio State University, he faced prejudice. He was not allowed to live with the white students. And yet he did not give up. Why? Because sports is the great equalizer; if there is any aspect of life where merit, talent, and hard work pay off, fair and square, the same for everyone, it is sports. Because skin color does not make you run faster, swim quicker, or be smarter on the playing field. In sports, race simply does not matter. That is why when society changes, athletics often leads the way. First sports, then society. Yes, I know about racism. My grandad got death threats from the Ku Klux Klan when he played football for this university. They didn't want Black men on the field. But the

threats stopped when the team started winning. That's because sports is sports, it's not politics.

Head of Student Health: Getting death threats affects people's health, you know.

Head of Athletics: I am unfortunately all too aware of that.

President: Ah yes, you said. But you also said athletics teaches society to be less prejudiced. How is that not political?

Head of Athletics: Because it's about what we do on the field. Not about some silly mascot. We already changed Jim Crow to the Crow. What if protesters find something wrong with the new mascot? It brings politics back into sports, when we work hard to keep it out.

Secretary: Then you vote to keep the Crow.

Head of Athletics: I ... I didn't say that. Listen, it's hard. We have high school athletes who don't want to come here because they're embarrassed by the Crow. Parents who call me up and say the mascot is racist. It causes arguments on our teams. Protests. Bad press.

Protesters: Change the name, clean up our game! That racist crow has got to go!

Head of Athletics: The mascot has maybe become a distraction.

President: Then you vote to change the mascot.

Head of Athletics: Please, I'm not a politician, I don't want people calling me up and screaming at me that we're breaking a tradition. I don't want people spray-painting words on my car. Or my house. Or writing posts with pictures of my kids, saying where they go to school. Or my wife, where she works. I dealt with all that at my last job. Athletics should not be political. I'm tired of putting my family in danger for politics.

President: Darn it, you don't think athletics is political, but what isn't political in this world? Student Health, don't tell me the well-being of our students is political, too.

Head of Student Health: Well, in some ways it is. Researchers have measured the prejudice in this country in terms of health. Black people have a shorter life expectancy, and no it's not genetics, it's because prejudice translates into poverty and poorer health. We all know Black people are more likely to get pulled over by the police, more likely to go to jail, more likely to have longer prison terms, less likely to be hired for jobs.

Head of Student Senate: More likely to be the victims of crime.

Head of Student Health: Correct. Prejudice is a health problem. Because living in fear raises your stress level, raises your blood pressure, puts you at risk of stress-related diseases. And there's no earthly reason for it. It hurts a sports team to be divided; it hurts the country to be divided as well. The Crow has become part of the everyday inequality Black people face. Yes, it will be expensive, but we owe it to our students and their families. To our staff members and their families. To everyone.

President: I see. You know what changing it will cost?

Head of Student Health: And doing nothing in the face of prejudice — do you know what that will cost?

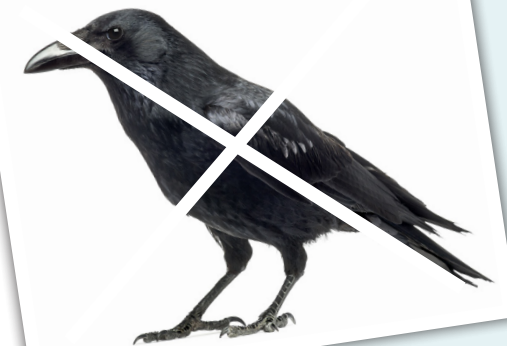
President: Mm, point well taken. Thank you everyone. I believe we're done here.

Speaker of Student Senate: Done? What? Excuse me, what just happened?

Head of Athletics: Justice just happened.

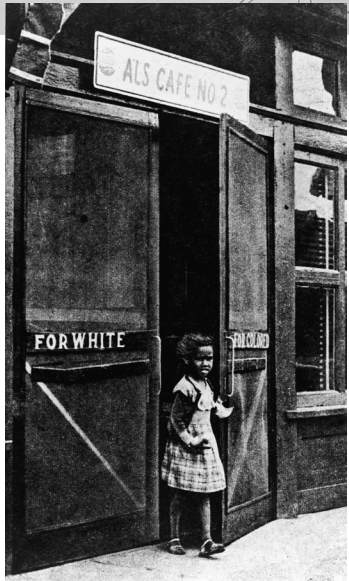
President: Yes, and justice is political, so it'll cost my resignation. But changing the mascot will be worth it.

Secretary: Thank you all for coming. Meeting adjourned.



What was Jim Crow?

The origin of “Jim Crow” as a derogatory term was a song from the mid-1800s which made fun of Black people. After US slavery was abolished in 1863, the term referred to laws, regulations, and other efforts to keep society (especially in the American South) segregated. This included separate neighborhoods, schools, hotels, restaurants, churches, universities, parks, beaches, drinking fountains, seats on buses and at movie theaters, and so on.



Consequences of Racism in the US

Many groups in the US have suffered from racism: native tribes; religious minorities; people from southern, eastern, and northern Europe; people with backgrounds in the Middle East and North Africa; African Americans; Asian Americans; Hispanic Americans; Caribbean and Pacific Islanders; and many others.

Slavery was a particularly deadly and inhumane form of legal racism. Slavery is long gone, but Black Americans still face trauma and injustice to a higher degree than others in the US. Prejudice and injustice affect people’s lives in many ways. Below are some statistics.

- Percentage of the US population which is Black: 13
- Percentage of inmates in federal and state prisons who are Black: 34
- Percentage of Black men who go to prison at some point in their lives: 32
- Percentage of white men that go to prison at some point in their lives: 4
- Percentage by which prison populations would drop if Black and Hispanic men were treated the same as white men: 40
- Infant deaths per 1,000 pregnancies for Black women: 10.8
- Infant deaths per 1,000 pregnancies for white women: 4.5
- Percentage of Blacks with hypertension (high blood pressure): 42
- Percentage of whites with hypertension (high blood pressure): 29
- Life expectancy for Black men: 73
- Life expectancy for white men: 78
- Percentage of Black Americans with a university degree: 25
- Percentage of white Americans with a university degree: 35

(Figures from *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man* by Emmanuel Acho, Pan MacMillan Publishers; the Prison Policy Initiative; and other sources.)



Let's practice



1. Get it right

Read the dialogue and informative texts and answer the questions below. Point to clues in the texts.

Retire the Crow

- a) What is the name of this university, and where is it located?
- b) What is this meeting for, and who is present?
- c) Who is heard outside the meeting, and what do they want?
- d) Who is the only student in the room?
- e) In the past, what made the Crow look like a racist caricature?
- f) What student associations want the mascot changed?
- g) Who was Jesse Owens and what did he do?
- h) In the end, what is decided in the meeting?

Consequences of racism in the US

- a) In what areas of life have researchers measured the effects of prejudice against Black people?
- b) The text lists groups that have been subjected to racism in the US. What other groups have met prejudice there?
- c) What is referred to as a deadly form of legal racism?
- d) What is the statistical difference between Black people in the US and Black inmates in US prisons?
- e) What is the difference in life expectancy between Black men and white men in the US?
- f) Name two of the sources for these statistics.



2. True or false or both?

Discuss whether the following statements about "Retire the Crow" are **true** or **false** or **both**. Go back and study the text.

- a) The Speaker of the Student Senate thinks traditions are important.
- b) The Crow is a racist caricature.
- c) Minority students at BSU are not treated equally.

- d) The Head of Athletics is proud of the school's traditions.
- e) Everyone at the meeting wants the mascot changed.
- f) Sports and politics are not connected.
- g) The Head of Athletics presents good arguments.
- h) The Speaker of the Student Senate is the most important person at the meeting.



3. Word work

Complete the text using the following terms from the texts.

enforces, jail, decades, inequality, apartheid, chant, vote, population, evolved, prejudice, ignorant, suffer

When the people of a country, or the whole **(a)** gets to have a say, or **(b)**, in fair and honest elections, this is the sign of democracy. This a highly developed or **(c)** form of government. On the other hand, people who have no say in their government often **(d)**, or have troubled lives, due to poor laws and lack of basic freedoms. Societies can also be harmed by incorrect ideas or **(e)** about certain types of people, such in South Africa during its more than four **(f)** of the **(g)** era, when the country was racially divided. Another problem with societies troubled by unfairness or **(h)** is people being kept uneducated or **(i)**. However, lack of knowledge happens in fair societies as well, when groups isolate themselves and ignore or misread scientific findings.

When people want change quickly, they sometimes shout or **(j)** political slogans. Protesters sometimes go to prison or **(k)**, which is one way society **(l)** laws, or forces people follow them.



4. Short discussion

Discuss the following questions.

- Each generation discusses issues of prejudice. What are important issues for your generation? For older people? For people younger than you?
- Sports teams bring people from different parts of society together. What other activities or situations bring different groups together? Discuss.

- As societies change, symbols such as names of sports teams, public statues, books, fictional characters, food packaging, and company logos, are often changed too. Why? Discuss examples of symbols which have changed. What was the reasoning for each, and was it right? What symbols would you change, and why?
- Look up and discuss why “Black people” is capitalized (begins with a capital letter) in many texts while “white people” is not. Do you agree with these reasons?



5. Quick writing

Write a short text in response to the following questions.

- Scientists say fear of strangers is a result of evolution. And yet we gain much by cooperating with people from different backgrounds. Write about a time when you learned to work with someone new. What did it feel like, and what strategies did you use?
- What prejudices have you grown up with, where do they come from, and how can you overcome them?
- Instead of just looking down, our prejudices can also make us look up to groups. Discuss examples of friendly prejudice (e.g. thinking people from the US are good-natured). Can friendly prejudice be harmful? How does it compare to negative prejudice?



6. Focus on listening

Listen to the three stories on prejudice in the US. Listen to one story at a time, and answer the questions. Listen again if necessary.

Story 1

- a) True or false: Miami University of Ohio is located in Florida.
- b) True or false: Changing Miami University’s mascot was easy.
- c) Choose the best headline for the article:
 - i. Where is Miami University located?
 - ii. Changing mascots makes people angry
 - iii. How Miami University finally became the Redhawks

Story 2

- a) True or false: Cleveland’s baseball team was once called the Spiders.
- b) True or false: Native Americans liked the picture of Chief Wahoo.
- c) Choose the best headline for the article:
 - i. After a hundred years, a team changes name without drama
 - ii. Eight gigantic statues stand near a baseball stadium
 - iii. Baseball fans made fun of Native Americans

Story 3

- a) True or false: As a child, Jesse Owens was often sick.
- b) True or false: At a track meet in 1935, Jesse Owens broke three world records in an hour.
- c) Choose the best headline for the article:
 - i. A remarkable Olympic athlete – and a remarkable person
 - ii. How a sickly boy who picked cotton became a famous athlete
 - iii. Jesse Owens, a man no one dared discriminate against

