

**“THE HAPPIEST PLACE IN AMERICA  
IS BOULDER, COLORADO.”**

**- SAID NO BLACK PERSON EVER**



**THIS IS [NOT] WHO WE ARE**

**STUDY GUIDE  
FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION**

[WWW.THISISNOTHOWWEAREFILM.COM](http://WWW.THISISNOTHOWWEAREFILM.COM)

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

INTRODUCTION: SCOPE, STANDARDS, THEMES	3
VOCABULARY	4
CLASSROOM FILM VIEWING WORKSHEET AND ANSWERS	5
THINK PAIR SHARE	7
SOCRATIC SEMINAR	8
RESEARCH: SELF, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIETY	12
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S BELOVED COMMUNITY: EXERCISE	13
MINDFULNESS AND SELF-COMPASSION	15
IDEAS FOR TAKING ACTION	16
RESOURCES	17
CREDITS	18

## SCOPE:

This study guide is designed to further engage middle and high school students after watching the film **This is [Not] Who We Are**. While Boulder, Colorado is sometimes thought of as a bubble, it is a microcosm for the US and many important issues in our nation. Teachers can use the study guide to form classroom dialogues, grow a sense of community and belonging, and further develop awareness of issues and harms of the past and the present.

These exercises can contribute towards building a more equitable future for all.

## STANDARDS-BASED APPROACH:

Borrowing from the National Council for Social Studies, the design approach offers suggestions to teachers that support secondary education (grades 6-12) national standards and multicultural themes such as: Culture, People Places & Environment, Individual Development and Identity, Civic Ideals and Practices, and Power, Authority, and Governance. The guide also provides writing prompts that can be used across the curriculum in a variety of disciplines from language and composition, literacy, writing, to critical thinking.

## THEMATIC APPROACH TO USING THIS TOOLKIT:

Concepts related to race, identity, community, history, and policy may stir up varying degrees of curiosity or deep emotions, as they can touch on our sense of places or values. The following themes are explored in the study guide activities.

## THEMES:

- Identity and sense of self give us a better understanding of ourselves in the world. Race impacts everyone's experience, whether we are conscious of it or not.  
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/social-justice-standards>
- Cultural awareness illuminates how various cultures experience life and how we can show respect for the similarities and differences.  
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/social-justice-standards>
- Community - Multiple communities can exist in a single location. Each community has its own culture and norms.  
(National Geography Standards by National Council for Geographic Education)  
<https://ncge.org/teacher-resources/national-geography-standards/>
- History - Our sense of identity is partially shaped by our understanding of historical, economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.  
[https://www.educationworld.com/standards/national/soc\\_sci/us\\_history/5\\_12.shtml](https://www.educationworld.com/standards/national/soc_sci/us_history/5_12.shtml)
- Justice relates to our sense of fairness and equity in community and society.  
<https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/national-curriculum-standards-social-studies>

# VOCABULARY

Below are a few important race-related terms and concepts. Some terms are not well understood. Some cause upset reactions because of the pain and harm caused by unfair treatment. These feelings are valid and it is helpful to have class discussions facilitated by supportive adults.

Concepts for possible discussion related to the film:

- identity
- race
- diversity
- equity
- inclusion
- justice
- belonging
- racial profiling
- implicit bias
- racial equity
- institutional racism
- redlining
- Jim Crow era
- systems of white supremacy
- privilege
- allyship
- microaggressions / subtle acts of exclusion
- internalized bias
- marginalization

## Suggested source materials & definitions:

Racial Equity Tools Glossary <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, <https://www.ahdictionary.com/>

Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>



# CLASSROOM FILM VIEWING WORKSHEET

*This study guide worksheet can be used to accompany a first-time viewing of the film. While students watch the film, this guide can help highlight particular moments or key concepts.*

**Film rating: TV-PG**

## Study Guide Questions:

- 1) Zayd Atkinson quote: "The first thing that came to mind was this man is \_\_\_\_\_ me."
- 2) Thomas Windham quote: "We create the reality in which we live. The absence of diversity promotes \_\_\_\_\_ and that \_\_\_\_\_ promotes exclusivity of mind, exclusivity of body, exclusivity of time and space."
- 3) Where does this film take place? It is referred to on a TV program as the happiest place in America to live.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Describe the "weapon" the police officer accuses Zayd of carrying: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What Native American tribe is mentioned as one who lived on the lands of the city prior to settlers arriving and the city being "founded"? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) "The city wanted to have \_\_\_\_\_ living here." One of the ways early city "founders" tried to make Boulder elite was to charge for \_\_\_\_\_.
- 7) What year was the first record of an African-American living in the city? \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) What jobs were African-Americans able to access in Boulder in the 1800's? Men:  
\_\_\_\_\_ Women: \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) What happened to the all-Black serving staff at Chautauqua in its second year? \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) When Ruth Flowers talks about the Ku Klux Klan, she says African-Americans couldn't even buy themselves \_\_\_\_\_.
- 11) What industry drove population growth in the 1950s and 1960s? \_\_\_\_\_ "But the pace of cultural change did not keep up with \_\_\_\_\_".
- 12) Mahayla, a barista, said that she was always the one in her friend group to get in trouble and \_\_\_\_\_, for things that her white friends did too, though they were \_\_\_\_\_.
- 13) After Vaughn is the target of racist name-calling at his middle school, his mother says, "They didn't seem to punish the person who was doing the \_\_\_\_\_ as opposed to punishing the \_\_\_\_\_."
- 14) When Katrina, the filmmaker, comes to the university as a student, she recalls how, "in order to fit in and make friends, I tried putting on khakis, jeans, and Birkenstocks. It didn't work. I didn't feel \_\_\_\_\_. But when I look back on it as an adult it really breaks my heart that I \_\_\_\_\_. No one should ever have to do that."
- 15) What does it take for the police to finally back down from the situation with Zayd?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- 16) Of the request by Boulder citizens for a \_\_\_\_\_, what does the local NAACP ask for? What happens to their request? \_\_\_\_\_.
- 17) In the policing incident that ends with Sammie Lawrence being tackled and injured by an officer, what does \_\_\_\_\_.

he accuse Sammie of doing? What does he accuse the other people of doing? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

18) Why is the officer who threatened Zayd Atkinson considered not to have racially profiled Zayd?  
\_\_\_\_\_

19) What does Dr. Reiland Rabaka describe that is finally coming to the University of Colorado at Boulder? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

20) Penfield Tate III says, "At a certain point your \_\_\_\_\_ becomes  
\_\_\_\_\_ to perpetuate the disparity that the policy is creating."

21) Pedro Silva says: All of us could learn to love people more deeply by \_\_\_\_\_ instead of taking  
our perspective on the limited amount that we know about \_\_\_\_\_ and thinking that's enough...  
If you want to love me then you need to \_\_\_\_\_, and if I want to love you, then I need  
to \_\_\_\_\_.

# WORKSHEET ANSWERS

- 1) Profiling
- 2) Isolation, isolation
- 3) Boulder, Colorado
- 4) Trash picker/grabber tool and bucket
- 5) Arapahoe
- 6) A select group of people
- 7) 1870
- 8) Men: shoe-shining, inspecting/walking the railroad tracks; Women: washing and ironing, working in homes. Both: Rarely, running their own businesses.
- 9) They were replaced by an all-white staff
- 10) An ice-cream cone
- 11) Technology
- 12) Made to pay fines, tickets, and appear in court; We are destined to get screwed.
- 13) Hate speech; victim
- 14) Like I was being myself, tried to change who I was to make people like me
- 15) His older white male supervisor arrives and explains that Zayd is a work study student picking up trash. Zayd says he was upset by the fact that it takes a white male's testimony for the police to believe he is who he has repeatedly said he is.
- 16) Oversight Committee of the Boulder Police; for the NAACP to be allowed to choose the committee members; City Council denies their request.
- 17) Sammie is accused of obstructing a police officer and resisting arrest. The other people are accused of littering.
- 18) Because he doesn't use racist epithets during his encounter with Zayd.
- 19) The Center for African and African-American Studies (CAAAS), the sort of center other universities have had for decades.
- 20) Inaction; intentional action
- 21) Listening to one another's stories

# THINK, PAIR, SHARE

Using quotes from film subjects for discussion and questions that follow, ask students to reflect individually in writing, then share their ideas with a partner and, finally, join the entire class to explore and share diverse opinions. You may also ask small groups of students to answer specific quotes that you assign, or you may ask all students to read and provide answers to questions. You can also use the prompts for group discussion only, or turn prompts into essay assignments.

## ZAYD ATKINSON (UNIVERSITY STUDENT)



*“I knew the [police officer’s] camera was rolling and I said, Okay, call your lieutenant. Get your lieutenant down here. I said, call everyone down here because you’re making a big mistake.... But he still refused to put his weapon away. I’m picking up trash and by the time we get to the back of my building is when I realized he had put his taser away and at that point he actually got his gun out. It was a real eerie moment. Behind my building, you can’t really see anything. I knew at that point that he was trying to look for a shot to actually shoot me. And there wasn’t really anything else I could do besides make noise. You know, I started, I kind of just started yelling. I didn’t really know what was going on with him. I was trying to get through to his consciousness. I was trying to get through his mind. I was trying to get through to his heart. And I wanted him to realize what he was about to do.”*

What do you think Zayd was thinking and feeling during his encounter with the Boulder police officer? How did he perceive his previous experience with police? What do you think the Boulder police officer was thinking and feeling, and why?

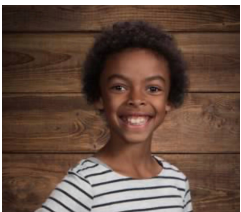
What were Zayd’s strategies to keep himself safe?

What do you think Zayd knew about his legal rights and status given that he told the officer, “You’re making a big mistake”?

How do you imagine you would respond if you were in Zayd’s position? How do you imagine you would have responded if you were the police officer?

How do you think Zayd felt when a white male staff member of his university immediately convinced the officer that Zayd was a student doing his work study job when Zayd had not been able to convince the officer?

## CELINE SAMUEL (MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT)



*“The school I used to go to in Boulder Valley School District -- there was a person who started to like really, really badly bully me. She sent me a picture of me. I think that she made the photo black and white. And then she drew on it with like X’s over my eyes – and wrote, “I hope you die, I hope you die, I hope you die.” And yeah, that was really, really hard. Because I was also the only Black girl. She would like in the hallways, all of a sudden, she would be like, what’s up my N word? You’re my N word. You’re my N word. When she made that video, she was like, I’m just gonna eat my chips and chill because I know that nothing’s gonna happen to me. When I finally told [over a year later], we sat in the principal’s office and talked about it, but then she started to cry. And she was like, it’s been really hard for me. And the teachers were like, It’s okay. It’s okay. It’s okay.”*

**[Note: This material can be emotionally triggering for BIPOC students. Consider offering affinity spaces for pair/share discussion.]**



What do you think Celine was thinking and feeling in response to being bullied?

What forms of bullying does Celine describe? Have you ever bullied, witnessed, or experienced any of these kinds of bullying? If so, how did it feel and what did you do about it, if anything?

How do you think Celine felt when the girl who bullied her cried in the principal's office? How could teachers and school administrators have better supported Celine?

How might statements from her bully have affected Celine?

How could Celine's peers have been good allies to support her if they witnessed bullying?

## **VAUGHN ANGLIN (UNIVERSITY STUDENT)**



*"I was called the N word, flat out to my face, fifth grade. Once in middle school, it just got way worse. They were just always calling me the N word, things like that. I had people tell me, "Hang on a tree." Very mad at that stage of my life.... Before I came to school, I would just think about being Black. What's going to happen today? Am I going to get in a fight? Am I going to get suspended? There were times where I'd just be suspended back to back, back to back, back to back. Every single time I got suspended, the principal was like, 'I don't know what to do.' And they would make me just sit in a room after everything would happen, they would make me sit in a room for the entire day."*

How often do you think about race (or bias based on skin tone) in terms of how it impacts your daily life?

Why do some Black people use the N word? Why are Black students upset when non-Black students use the term?

How is Vaughn's suspension an example of injustice? How might his experience relate to Zayd's experience with the police? Have you ever been unjustly punished for something that you did not do?

What could Vaughn's peers have done to support him if they witnessed him being racially bullied?

## **AVA ANGLIN (HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT)**



*"People like it here. It's not like people are like, 'Wow, it really sucks how white it is' because they don't think about that. They're comfortable. Everyone else looks like them. Everyone else perceives the world the way they do. We have such a homogenous population. Kids are growing up in a place where they just, they don't see minorities. And if people don't see it as a problem, then there's going to be no effort to change something that they're fine with."*

Describe students in your school and community. Do they look like you?

What impact does or would it have on you to be surrounded by people who look like you?

What may be lacking in a community with homogeneity of skin tone, socioeconomic class status, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation/gender identity?

What do you think about Ava's comment that in Boulder the majority of the population perceives the world through a single lens?

What strengths does diversity offer our families, schools, and communities?

## AVA ANGLIN (HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT)



*“I often am in more advanced classes in the school, which tend to be a lot whiter. More often than not, I will be the only person of color in a room. Last year, I was taking an AP writing class and we had the Socratic seminar. It was supposed to be about how white people can’t talk about race and how that’s a problem in our society, you know. And the entire time everyone was avoiding this subject, like nobody would actually talk about anything. I’m very vocal in class and I was like,*

*Look, we’re having a Socratic seminar about how white people can’t talk about race. And none of you are talking about race.”*

What is difficult about talking about race? Where do you turn when you have questions about race?

What should you consider before engaging in a conversation about race with someone who doesn’t share your racial identity?

What do you think was going on with Ava’s peers when they wouldn’t talk about the Socratic seminar topic? If they felt uncomfortable or afraid, how could they work with these feelings and be able to participate in the class dialogue?

How could the teacher Ava mentions have run the class in a more successful way?

How can you learn about your racial history?

## ASHA ROMEO (UNIVERSITY STUDENT; NOT INCLUDED IN FILM)



*“In middle school we were going over the Civil War unit. A close friend of mine came up to me in the hall one day and said she thought I would be one of the coolest slaves that was able to escape or something along those lines. I think she truly thought she was being thoughtful or compassionate, but it was definitely very backhanded.*

*Some teachers had taught the Civil War by having us watch a movie about African slaves on a ship being taken to America. The part of the movie we watched showed how colonists were cruel to the slaves on the ship and how they would occasionally tie rocks to them and throw slaves off the ship and treat them incredibly inhumanely. It really upset me and I ended up crying in the class. I stayed after class because I was upset and no one seemed to be as upset as I was.”*

What might Asha be feeling about her friend’s comment? Have you ever felt anything similar? Can you locate that feeling in your body?

What do you do if you find out you’ve offended someone or hurt their feelings? How can you try to understand the perspective of someone who may be different from you in some way?

Can you think of ways the teacher could have made the Civil War unit more culturally sensitive? Also, was there a way for the teacher to help non-Black-identifying students feel more deeply connected to the pain of the material being presented?

How can the accomplishments and resilience of African-Americans be celebrated in history and other classes?

## MAHAYLA ROSE (DANCER/BARISTA)



*“Throughout all of high school, I’m the friend who got into all of the trouble. I’m not stupid. I have a good head on my shoulders. Probably better than a lot of my friends. I didn’t go out there living, doing the craziest things or violent things or anything like that. But I was always the one to get in trouble and not caught, but actually prosecuted, going to court, paying fines, paying tickets consistently for things that my white friends would get caught for the same thing and just let off, time and time again. So yeah, from a very young age, I’ve also felt like we really are just destined to get screwed.”*

Why would Mahayla get in trouble but her friends would not?

What do you know about the difference between how our policing and justice systems treat people based on perceptions of racial, economic, and other differences?

What might the long-term effects be on Mahayla of having her experiences of racial inequity and injustice? What about the effects on her friends, who were “let off time and time again?”

## SAMMIE LEON LAWRENCE IV (YOUTH & DISABILITY ACTIVIST; FORMERLY UNHOUSED)



*“I know myself as a young Black man who has an Afro and I know that I can be seen as intimidating, which is really weird for me to say because honestly it breaks my heart. It breaks my heart that people, even before my brain injury happened and I needed to carry a walking aid, would look to the side and not make eye contact or look away and then do that look back as if they’re avoiding someone. It pains my heart to have people clutch their bags and their purses closer to them as I walk by.”*

What is the harm being done to Sammie because of dominant cultural stereotypes about Black men? How are other people, including people who react with fear and avoidance, also being harmed?

Subtle acts of aggression can be gestures, body language, eye movements, and verbal comments. Sometimes these acts can be intentional and sometimes they are unintentional. What are ways we can pay attention to our own subtle and not so subtle acts of aggression? What can we do when we sense these feelings and thoughts arise in ourselves?

How did members of Boulder’s City Council judge Sammie’s behavior when he was confronted and assaulted by a police officer? How was brutality against him excused and/or justified by members of the community?

How can you help people who are being discriminated against and mistreated in your school, community, or state?

# SOCRATIC SEMINAR

Socratic seminars are a way to have a group engage in deep exploration of complex material. The process is designed to explore open-ended questions and won't always offer a sense of closure or consensus. Socratic seminars encourage critical thinking and engagement, allowing students to lead, debate, ask questions of each other, and move the conversation more naturally. Students should cite evidence from the film, using characters, events, and vocabulary to support their points of view. Creating a safe and supportive space for conversation is crucial. This can be achieved through using respectful language, practicing sensitivity to others, active listening, suspending judgment, not interrupting, being open to different perspectives, seeking common ground, being willing to learn, and being authentic and worthy of trust.

Tip: This is a suggested list of discussion questions. It is better to go for depth than coverage.

## SOCRATIC SEMINAR QUESTIONS:

If you could ask anyone in the film a question, what would it be?

What are your emotional reactions to the film? Which characters do you identify with or have empathy towards? How and why? In the stories that were told, what was most powerful for you and why?

What did you feel and think about the experiences of Celine, the young student bullied at school? What could help prevent what happened to her from happening to other students?

What are your thoughts about the culture and world you were born into? Is your community different from or similar to the story depicted in the film? How do you think socioeconomic class issues impact racial and other kinds of equity in your community and nationally?

What's your analysis of what happened to Zayd, who was confronted by multiple police officers? What did you learn from his story, and how do you think his story being covered by the national press has affected others?

Boulder's Police Oversight Committee, whose creation is briefly featured in the film, has not worked out as citizens have hoped. It is the subject of ongoing contention about who gets to serve and is the subject of lawsuits. Why do you think there has been a struggle in Boulder over the Committee? Does this conflict bring to mind any political struggles in your community?

How did our society become organized around the construct of race and, often, segregated? Who and what caused that to happen and why? What are roles played by economics, social class, and power? What can we do to change individual and systemic racism?

"All of us could learn to love people more deeply by learning their stories instead of taking our perspective on the limited amount that we know about their story and thinking that's enough... If you want to love me, then you have to hear my story and if I want to love you, then I have to hear your story." What is the meaning of this quote? How does this story affect you?

What's going on in your school in terms of students from various backgrounds feeling included, respected, and seen? Does everyone have a sense of belonging? How do you know? What can be done to improve the culture at your school so that all students feel good about being there?

Lilla Watson, an indigenous Australian, is credited with this quote: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." How does the film address this point? Do you agree?

# RESEARCH: SELF, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIETY

**This is [Not] Who We Are** began as an exploration of little-known aspects of the history of Boulder and the past and contemporary lived experience of Black residents. The editing of the film shows how Boulder's past informs its present, including its present dilemmas and problems with diversity, equity, inclusion, and a sense of belonging. The prompts below are ways individual students or small groups can work on learning more about their community and themselves. They can be used for research and writing projects or can serve as conversation starters. Some are also appropriate for Socratic Seminars.

## STRATEGIES FOR RESEARCHING:

Use primary source documents - oral histories, interviews, news articles, memoirs and other writings, photographs, Census data, redlining records, and local ordinances past and present to create a research project about one of the prompts.

If you can't find information about a historical topic, what does that mean? Why is something missing?

## RESEARCH PROMPTS:

### SELF

**Racial Autobiography** - How do you self-identify racially? Looking back to your childhood, what are your early memories learning about race and racial differences? What was the nature of the messages you received and who was the source of these messages? How did you feel about what you learned? How has that shaped you consciously or subconsciously?

**Identity & Equity** - Describe the sense of belonging you and other students do or don't feel in your school/community. What issues of inclusion or marginalization (LGBTQIA+, disability/neurodiversity, race, immigration, classism, religion, etc.) are most alive in your school or community? What efforts are being made by your school/community leaders to solve any problems related to exclusion, inequity or abuse? What positive ways to you celebrate your community? Does everyone participate?

**Lived Experience** - How do the legacy of enslavement and the reality of institutional racism impact the behaviors of all Americans today? It is known that trauma lives in the body and in our DNA. Many people experience intergenerational trauma and are working with this form of trauma every day. How can people heal from these harms? The lived experience of Black Americans includes inherited intergenerational resilience. What are the ways in which you see resilience in people you know, your community, and the larger culture?

**Privilege** - Consider both conscious and unconscious dynamics of dominant racial group privilege. Read "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," by Peggy McIntosh. Discuss some of her words of advice. Consider how race, gender, sex, age, economics, education and how other forms of privilege get enacted in society. Why is recognizing the dynamics of privilege important to understanding ourselves and our communities and to relationship-building?

### COMMUNITY

**Celebrating Black Resilience and Achievements** - In your community, who are the Black leaders and officials, Black churches, and organizations celebrating Black culture and achievements and/or working on behalf of equity and justice for African-Americans? Who are the Black artists, entrepreneurs, business owners, and other prominent contributors to community life?

**The History of Race and Conflict in Your Community** - What's the history of public spaces in your community? Were any diverse neighborhoods impacted by their development in beneficial or adverse ways? Have you become aware of any popular beliefs about your community that are inaccurate?

**Land and History** - Research the land you are on. Who was here originally, before settlers arrived? Use this link to learn about the Native American people who occupied the land you live and go to school on: <https://native-land.ca/> When waves of settlers arrived where you live, who were they and how did neighborhoods evolve over time? Was there segregation of neighborhoods, cemeteries, access to land, commerce, and services? Did redlining occur in your community, formally or informally? What was the impact? See <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=11/39.943/-105.183> for examples of historic redlining maps.

**Race in the Curriculum** - What do you observe about teaching and curriculum at your school? How are Black history, enslavement, the Civil War, the Reconstruction Era, and the civil rights era/civil rights taught? What could be taught in addition or instead, as a way of celebrating Black history and culture? Have you ever felt uncomfortable during a classroom discussion of the history class topics listed above? If so, what's the nature of the discomfort? Are you okay feeling uncomfortable? When and why do you feel okay or not okay? In your history or social studies classes, how much attention is paid to the history and contributions (rather than the oppression and/or victimhood) of people of the past and present? What changes in the curriculum would make it more representative of diversity in the U.S.?

## **SOCIETY**

**Policing** - What is the history of policing where you live and nationally? What tactics do police officers use to maintain safety and/or control people? In what ways might some police intentionally or unintentionally carry out forms of profiling, racism, classism, sexism, or discrimination? Are there examples of poor, unfair, or violent policing in your community? What do you imagine can be done to create change so that all people can feel safe in their community?

**Centering Diverse Perspectives** - Think about the messages you are exposed to by news media, advertising, social media, and even in the classroom. Whose narrative is most commonly emphasized and what messages are getting the most public attention and by whom? Have you ever discovered that you believed ideas or stories you later decided were not true? What did you learn from that? Who are the authors of books most commonly used in your classroom? Do you share similar identities with these authors? What is the importance of listening to diverse perspectives from people who are similar to and different from you?

**Comparative Historical Documents** - Read the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech (presented August 1963). What do they have in common? To learn more about the history of racism in the US, read key Supreme Court decisions: Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857), Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), and Brown v. Board of Education (1954).

**Black History and Black Futures** - Is Black History month celebrated in your community, school, classroom, home? If so, how, and if not, why not? Why is Black History a concept? How is it juxtaposed with other histories? What about the present and future of Black people? Black people celebrate Black Futures as a way to honor ancestry while looking at the future to ensure equity, livelihood, well-being, and Black achievement. It encompasses the globally influential history of Africans and African-Americans, and their hopes and efforts to create a positive and celebratory future. Can you imagine this future? What does it look like? Why is thinking about Black Futures important?

**Demographics** - Using Census data, how have the racial, ethnic, and economic demographics changed in your community over time? Can you link demographics to wealth, education, and health disparities? Can you link major social and historical movements in the United States to the creation of and to changes in your community?

**Social Constructions of Race** - Race is considered a social construct. What does that mean? Why was "race" invented and kept alive as a social construct in the US? How has the construct evolved over time? Who or what is served by the perpetuation of the social construct of race? How do race and racism cause harm, and to whom?

**Policing** - How do racially disparate prosecution and incarceration of Black people continue some of the harms inflicted by our country's long history of enslaving people and profiting from exploiting them? What are the prison-industrial complex and the school-to-prison pipeline?

**KKK** - Sometimes people assume that the KKK was present only in the American South. However, the KKK has historical and present day influence in our country. It's depicted in the film as driving Black people and businesses out of Boulder in the first half of the 20th century. What are the past and current impacts of the Ku Klux Klan and other hate- or violence-promoting groups on your town, city, and/or state? Describe the social, economic, and political impact of hate groups in our country.

Describe "Institutional Racism". Is it possible for an organization or government agency to be racist? How do we know what that looks like? What forms might it take? Consider these domains: housing, banking/finance, employment, schools, health care, food, freedom from pollution/contamination, parks and nature, criminal justice, immigration, ability to vote, equity of representation in government and business. Consider what Ava Anglin says in the film about "a constant stream of light racism".

**The Importance of Language** - What's in a word? What's the relationship between language, perception, and behavior? Language is constantly evolving. Even the term BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) has been updated and some people are using the phrase, 'people of the global majority.' What are your thoughts on reframing of language? Provide examples of language development and the evolution of our thinking to reflect evolving consciousness.

**Film-as-text Analysis** - What's the meaning of the film's title, This is [Not] Who We Are, with the bracket around the word "not"? What messages were achieved by the filmmakers' strategy of 'weaving' historical and contemporary materials? What does the film teach about how the past informs and helps create the present? What do we learn about what has changed over time and what has remained more or less the same in terms of dynamics of power, equity, and fair treatment? What are the celebrations in the film of positive recent change? What is the hope for the future?

## **BELOVED COMMUNITY WRITING ASSIGNMENT:**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. talked about the Beloved Community as a concept for hope, healing, and racial equity for all people across all walks of life where "injustice ceases and love prevails." While he didn't create this concept, he helped to popularize it. Use the quotes below from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to support your ideas in an essay or to build classroom dialogue around each of the prompts.

*"Love is creative and redemptive. Love builds up and unites; hate tears down and destroys. The aftermath of the 'fight with fire' method which you suggest is bitterness and chaos, the aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community. Physical force can repress, restrain, coerce, destroy, but it cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that. Yes, love—which means understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill, even for one's enemies—is the solution to the race problem."* — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1957

*"There is another element that must be present in our struggle that then makes our resistance and nonviolence truly meaningful. That element is reconciliation. Our ultimate end must be the creation of the beloved community."* – Speech in Raleigh, North Carolina, April 15, 1960

**Option 1:** Consider the message of non-violence, Beloved Community, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Is it possible for an individual to be truly free in a society where some groups of people are oppressed? Why or why not? What does freedom mean if we do not have a society with respect, equity and justice for all people?

**Option 2:** Dr. Martin Luther King spoke of the dream of building the "Beloved Community". There are various views of what this is, but one is that everyone is cared for and there is no hate or poverty. Another is that there is love, acceptance, respect, and justice for everyone. What do you think about these views?

**Option 3:** YOUR "beloved community": What would a Beloved Community look and feel like to you? What is needed at your school and/ or in your community so everyone feels welcome and like they truly belong? How could you work with peers, teachers, and family to build one?

# MINDFULNESS & SELF-COMPASSION PRACTICE

Mindfulness practices focus on emotions, self-compassion, and transformation, with a goal of healing ourselves as individuals and healing our society.

When we explore issues of race in the United States, we realize we are living in a system of social conditioning. When we see ourselves as a part of that conditioning, we can better recognize the ways in which constructs of race and systems of oppression live inside each of us. When we develop our awareness of how our social conditioning plays out in our minds and behaviors, we may notice feelings of discomfort about our preconceptions, stereotypes, and biases towards others. We may also become aware of subtle acts of insensitivity or aggression (e.g., speech, gestures, facial expressions).

Being aware is a form of mindfulness. As we notice our thoughts, we may feel heightened emotions, such as feelings of shame, guilt, sadness or anger. These feelings are natural and are part of the human experience. How we decide to work with these feelings matters. We can cultivate self-compassion through practice, which then makes self-compassion more accessible in moments of difficulty.

For example, a moment of difficulty may be when we become aware of thoughts arising in our minds that we identify as biased or racist, or when we have acted out a biased or racist thought, intentionally or unintentionally. We can notice the thought and ask ourselves where that attitude or feeling comes from. Then we can work with our feelings and emotions, and work on addressing the social conditioning that helped cause our thought. We are not bad because of our conditioned thoughts, but we can become aware of them and the impact they have on ourselves and others. We have the ability to choose who we are beyond social conditioning.

If you would like to have more tools and practices to work with your own attitudes, feelings, and perceptions, consider developing a mindfulness practice. The practice of mindfulness requires intention and practice if our goal is to transform ourselves. Self-compassion means we are most able to grow and change when we are gentle with ourselves. By these means, we can work to become better allies, taking action in community and working to repair internal and historic harms caused by systems of oppression.

To learn more about working with emotions, self-compassion, and mindfulness, see the article “Mindfulness for Racial Justice”, <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/mindfulness-racial-justice>

Are you moved to take positive action in some way as a result of seeing this film? What are you moved to do? (See the Resources page on <http://www.thisisnothowwearefilm.com/resources>)



# RESOURCES:

## BOOKS

My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies,  
by Resmaa Menakem (2017)

Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation,  
by Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams, Lama Rod Owens, Jasmine Syedullah, Ph.D. (2016)

Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor (a workbook),  
by Layla F. Saad (2020)

Subtle Acts of Exclusion: How to Understand, Identify, and Stop Microaggressions,  
by Tiffany Jana (2020)

I Am an Antiracist Superhero: With Activities to Help You Be One Too! (an illustrated book),  
by Jennifer Bacon (2023)

## BY TOPIC:

Whose Land Am I On?  
<https://native-land.ca/>

Mindfulness and Social Justice - Working with mindfulness, grounding, working with emotions and shame,  
self-compassion <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/mindfulness-racial-justice>

Implicit Bias  
<http://breakingprejudice.org/group-activities/activities-in-english/acceptability-of-prejudice.html>

Carceral system injustice, <https://innocenceproject.org/our-work/>

## MICROAGGRESSIONS OR SUBTLE ACTS OF EXCLUSION

[\*We Need to Retire the Term "Microaggressions"\*](#) (Harvard Business Review March, 2022)

"Microaggressions" list:  
[https://academicaffairs.ucsc.edu/events/documents/Microaggressions\\_Examples\\_Arial\\_2014\\_11\\_12.pdf](https://academicaffairs.ucsc.edu/events/documents/Microaggressions_Examples_Arial_2014_11_12.pdf)

## WHITE PRIVILEGE

[\*Tool Kit for White Privilege\*](#)

[\*Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack\*](#),  
by Peggy McIntosh.

[\*Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building\*](#),  
by Maggie Potapchuk, Sally Leiderman, Donna Bivens, and Barbara Major (2005).

# CREDITS

## JENNIFER N. BACON, PH.D.

Core Associate Professor of Education, Naropa University



*Boulder is often thought of as a "bubble" or utopian society; however, as powerfully illuminated in the documentary, This is [Not] Who We Are, Boulder, Colorado is in fact a microcosm for the US with racial inequities that remain current and pressing yet are often dismissed and swept under the rug. This is [Not] Who We Are is a timely and must-see documentary brilliantly directed by Katrina Miller and Beret E. Strong.*

## ANTHONY GALLUCCI, MA, PH.D. CANDIDATE

Naropa University



*It is incumbent upon us to take every opportunity to heal. One aspect of healing is bringing awareness of the harm. The film serves that purpose well. Another component of health is ceasing to suffer. The workbook intends to contribute to this effort. Used together, I am optimistic that the two will be of benefit.*

## SEANN GOODMAN, MA

Director for Mission, Culture, and Inclusive Community, Naropa University



*To understand the lived experience across difference of people in our community we must take the time to listen. This Is [Not] Who We Are asks the important questions: Who is in my community? What is their story? How can I come to understand that our experiences are not the same? And how does my impact play a role in defining our shared American journey?*

## KATRINA MILLER, BA

Director/Producer/Narrator, This is [Not] Who We Are  
Owner of Blackat Video Productions



*I want my community to be a safe place for my children and all children. I hope our film sparks deep conversations around belonging, inclusion, and leadership. It was important to have most of the people in the film be Black because This is [Not] Who We Are is about our voices, which are usually silenced or given lower priority. We were determined to put Black perspectives at the forefront.*

## **REGINA SMITH, MFA, MA, PH.D CANDIDATE**

**Vice President of Mission, Culture, and Inclusive Community, Naropa University**



*This film brings our attention to the incongruence between our self-concept as a community that is liberal, progressive and welcomes diversity, and how we actually fail to demonstrate that in our behaviors, protocols and practices. The film makes the unconscious conscious so we can address the disparity between who we are and who we want to be. It is a generous invitation into integrity. We need to lean into the pain and discomfort expressed in the film so we can change communities for the better.*

## **BERET E. STRONG, PH.D., MFA**

**Director/Producer, This is [Not] Who We Are  
Owner, Landlocked Films**



*I care especially about the well-being of our youth. Fortunately, many of us are working together toward positive change. We made this film not just for the people of Boulder but for those of other communities with struggles not unlike ours. Viewers who watch our film will, we hope, be moved to engage in self-reflection, productive dialogue, and transformational action wherever they live.*

## **JOHN TWEEDY, J.D., MA**

**Editor, This is [Not] Who We Are  
Owner, Landlocked Films & mediator/attorney**



*Editing This Is [Not] Who We Are was one of the most profound learning experiences of my 25-year filmmaking career. It required a deep exploration of my community, my relationships, and myself. I hope the film, and the accompanying Study Guide, will offer students an invitation – and a path – to explore their own communities and lives.*

## **THOMAS WINDHAM, PH.D.**

**Psychologist & Educator; former president of the Boulder Valley School District Board of Education**



*Having lived in Boulder for 54 years, I thought I knew Boulder. Not until I saw this documentary was I able to untangle the origins of racism and elitism that braid Boulder's social fabric. One can see clearly how racism and elitism are intentional. Relations between national policies and social practices are manifested in the establishment and evolution of a community. If a person wants an historical, expertly documented view of the expansion of racism in America, this film is a must.*

### **Photos and cover art courtesy of:**

Boulder Museum of History Boulder  
Carnegie Library for Local History  
Chautauqua Association

## USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide supports groups and individuals who want to use **This is [Not] Who We Are** to stimulate conversation, reflection and engagement for themselves and their communities. It is intended to help deepen some of the content of the film and provide context and thoughtful questions. While the film is about one city -- Boulder, Colorado -- the issues in it resonate in communities around the United States. If you are watching with a group, we invite you to prepare a bit before you watch the film and to follow it with discussion and, if so moved, engaged action. Having a speaker from your group or community facilitate discussion can be very fruitful, and panel discussions allow for a more diverse, deeper exploration of the material.

We also invite you to access more resources and information by visiting the film's website:

<https://www.thisisnothowwefilm.com>,

To contact the filmmakers or to schedule a community screening:



video  
project

To purchase for educational or institutional use:

Video Project

[www.videoproject.org](http://www.videoproject.org)

1-800-4-PLANET (1-800-475-2638)

Official film [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#) or tag us @NotWhoWeAreFilm

Copyright 2023. Landlocked Films llc. All Rights Reserved.