

# Reckoning with Race: How Leaders can Navigate Difficult Conversations at Work

Race is perhaps the most fraught subject in contemporary society. As recent events have demonstrated this dynamic continues to impact our social, political and economic lives, often with devastating consequences. Our workplaces are no exception. This course will examine how we got here, what our immediate challenges are, how we go about having difficult dialogues and offer some suggestions for where we might go from here.

## Session One:

### The Original Sin: A Brief History of a Terrible Idea

#### Guiding Question:

How did we get here and why has race remained a pernicious stumbling block in American society?

Race does not exist as a biological category yet it is deeply enshrined in our society and has been since the very beginning. But comparatively few of us know just how deeply or why and how it has persisted for so long. This is a crash course on how an imaginary category came to have real consequences and the twisted route it has taken through the history of the United States down to the present moment.

## Session Two: The Challenges of the Immediate Moment

### Guiding Question:

The fault lines of race seem more pronounced than ever: what are some best practices for meeting this moment in the workplace?

The death of George Floyd in May of this year triggered a nationwide series of protests whose impact continues to be felt in every sector of society. This moment has challenged institutions and companies to look inward at the racial dynamics of their own workplaces as well as their broader social responsibilities. What should forward-thinking leadership be considering? And equally important: what should they not do as they attempt to move forward?

## Session Three:

### The Difficult Dialogue: How to Talk About Race

#### Guiding Question:

Even the best intentioned conversations on this subject can feel like navigating a minefield, particularly when talking with people who disagree with you. How can we approach these conversations productively?

Polarization and distrust of people whom we disagree with has made some of the most mundane conversations difficult. How, in such a time, can we dialogue about an issue that is complicated and contentious even in the best of circumstances? It is possible to discuss this subject without anyone resorting to shouting. We'll explore some ways to do it.

## Session Four:

### Moving Forward

#### Guiding Question:

Where can we go from here?

We don't lack for ways to make positive change, but we have often lacked for the will to do it. As a capstone conversation, we'll explore some practical ways to address the concerns of employees, foster a positive workplace environment and contribute to positive change.

# About the Facilitators



Jelani Cobb is the author of *Substance of Hope: Barack Obama and the Paradox of Progress*, and *To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic*, among others. As a long-time staff writer at *The New Yorker*, Cobb wrote a remarkable series of articles about race, injustice, and the police; for which he received the Sidney Hillman Prize for Opinion & Analysis Journalism. He also teaches at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. There, he recently accepted a duPont-Columbia Award on behalf of filmmaker Ava Duvernay's Oscar-nominated documentary *13th* –in which he was prominently featured as an expert on the ‘mythology of black criminality’.

[Learn more](#)



Dr. Keegan Walden is Torch's Co-Founder and COO. He has an extensive background in leadership development and in the measurement of leadership growth over time. Keegan has a Ph.D. and an M.S. in psychology from Northwestern, and a B.A. from Yale.

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Reserve seats for me  
or my organization