

Q&A

Q: WHY IS THE SMITHSONIAN STARTING AN INITIATIVE TO TAKE ON THE ISSUES OF RACE AND RACISM?

A: At this pivotal time in America's history, there is an urgent need to talk openly about race and racism. Race has shaped our past in countless ways and will impact our future. We believe now is the time to bring together people of all races and backgrounds to have an honest conversation about what race means to each of us. The racial awakening that followed the murder of George Floyd last year encouraged us to take a lead in the national discussions in a thoughtful, meaningful way. This topic—in this moment—is too important to ignore.

Q: WHAT IS THE SMITHSONIAN'S ROLE IN CONVERSATIONS SURROUNDING RACE AND RACISM?

A: The Smithsonian is uniquely positioned to provide vital historical perspective on some of the most challenging issues of our times, including race and racism. The Smithsonian possesses a wide-ranging historical perspective on these issues. We are also fortunate to possess a wealth of relevant objects and documents that can help facilitate a deeper understanding of our history and generate dialogue.

Q: WHAT IS THE SMITHSONIAN HOPING TO ACCOMPLISH THROUGH THIS PROGRAMMING?

A: The Smithsonian offers perspective and historical context. We want to educate and empower those taking part in this conversation and encourage people to share their own personal experiences and feelings. It is important that we not shy away from difficult or uncomfortable conversations. This initiative will create numerous opportunities on multiple platforms to engage people on the issues of race and racism in a substantive way.

Q: WHAT HAS THE SMITHSONIAN DONE TO ADDRESS RACIAL DISPARITIES AND INEQUITIES WITHIN ITS OWN ORGANIZATION?

A: We recognize that as we ask Americans to examine how race impacts their lives and views, we must take a hard look at our organization. The Smithsonian has a long-standing commitment to the principles of diversity and equity in the workplace and in its public-facing programs. Institution-wide, programs like the Smithsonian Accessibility Program have led the Smithsonian in identifying areas of opportunity and serving as models for other museums. We can and will do better, and toward that end, we are hiring a head of diversity to help us do so.

Q: WHAT IS BANK OF AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE CAMPAIGN AND THE PROGRAMMING?

A: Bank of America has been a trusted partner of Smithsonian museums and cultural initiatives for more than three decades and was a founding member of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. The Smithsonian is proud to partner with Bank of America on this important initiative as they also recognize the need to take advantage of this moment in America's history to have meaningful and productive discussions about race and racism.

Q: WHAT DOES THE TERM 'RECKONING' MEAN TO THE SMITHSONIAN?

A: The word is used in the sense of coming to terms and having a full understanding. Reckoning with Our Racial Past confronts the historical roots and contemporary impacts of race and racism in the United States and globally. This initiative seeks to spark positive social change, unity, and healing to help build a more equitable shared future. A public survey indicated that 87 percent of those interviewed said 'Our Shared Future: Reckoning with Our Racial Past' made our intentions clear and was relevant to this moment in America.

Q: WHERE DID THE NAME 'OUR SHARED FUTURE' COME FROM?

A: 'Our Shared Future' is an umbrella phrase that was chosen because it will work for several projects we have planned for the future. It reflects our desire to spark positive social change, unity, and healing to help build a more equitable shared future. For example, this initiative is about race and racism, another might be 'Our Shared Future: Tackling Climate Change' and another might be about education.