This book was written to explain what makes discussions about race difficult and to provide strategies for facilitators who find themselves engaged in difficult dialogues. According to Sue, dialogues about race become difficult when unintended racial slights against ethnic minorities are made and when biases and prejudices are addressed publicly. Both types of encounters involve strong emotions because values, beliefs, images, and reputations are heavily invested in the topic. And yet failure to address race as a topic can contribute to a feeling of being silenced; the deterioration of one’s mental health; a hostile work environment; physical health problems; decreased work productivity and poor problem-solving skills. Sue argues that difficult dialogues must be had since they offer opportunities for growth, better communication and learning. Perhaps most significantly for our students, race talks prepare our students to compete in a global economy.

Sue posits that race talk is always uncomfortable because it reveals a clash of racial realities for whites and ethnic minorities. While many white Americans view the US as having achieved a post-racial state of racial equality, many ethnic minorities perceive the common insults and slights they encounter on a regular basis as problematic. Consequently, most people like to avoid the strong feelings that emerge from talking about race and therefore prefer to skip the topic, remain silent about it, or ignore racial topics when they do come up. Sue encourages a protocol that defies the societal norm. Race talk, he argues, should 1) address issues such as race, racism, Whiteness and White privilege. 2) Race talk should allow room for strong emotions and should allow participants to talk about their experiences. 3) Race talk should challenge the notion of a color-blind society. 4) Race talk should allow for varying communication styles. 5) Race talk should lead to some type of action to eliminate racism in its different forms.

This book is particularly useful for those looking to understand why discussions about race can be difficult. While most of the book focuses on the problems of racial dialogue, more of it could have been used to demonstrate the process for navigating a difficult race dialogue that achieved a successful outcome. However, Sue reserves successful strategies for the book’s end. To successfully facilitate conversations about race, Sue advocates 1) being aware of one’s own values, biases, prejudices, and assumptions; 2) acknowledging and admitting one’s own racial biases; 3) being comfortable talking about race openly; 4) understanding emotions and being open to all of them; 5) creating the conditions in which all feelings are allowed and validated; 6) being able to get to the deeper meanings that occur in race talk; 6) acknowledging and validating the feelings of participants when necessary; 7) helping participants to explore their own feelings and what those feelings might be saying about them; 8) being able to get past blocks and silences; 9) understanding differences in communication styles; 10) being deliberate and planning ahead; 11) validating and encouraging those who demonstrate risk-taking by speaking authentically.