



The 20-Minute Talk Episode 1-Introduction to the MAP Center's Anti-Racism Vodcast

Anti-Racism Vodcast Series

Dr. Kathleen King Thorius and Dr. Seena Skelton



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[Intro Music]

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Hello and welcome to the Region III Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center Anti-Racism Vodcast Series entitled, The 20-Minute Talk. The Region III MAP Center's Anti-Racism Vodcast Series aims to advance anti-racism efforts and support anti-racist activities within school communities across and beyond the MAP Center's 13-state region with a succinct 20-minute discussion led by anti-racist practitioners.

Nickie Coomer: This Anti-Racism Vodcast episode is focused on introducing the MAP Center's Anti-Racism Vodcast Series. We'll be hosting these series over the course of the upcoming year and will feature a variety of topics related to intersectional anti-racism across identity and lived experience.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: So, my name is Tiffany Kyser and I serve as the Associate Director of Engagement and Partnerships for the MAP Center and I am thrilled to be hosting this Anti-Racism Vodcast Series with my colleague, Nickie Coomer, who will serve as my fellow co-host. Nickie is a Doctoral Research Assistant with the MAP Center.

Nickie Coomer: We are also thrilled to have two guests who not only are tremendous scholars and practitioners in educational equity work, but also will lead us in affirming and deepening our understanding of anti-racism and engaging and or leading anti-racist practices in our school communities. So joined with us today are Dr. Kathleen King Thorius, Executive Director and Principal Investigator of the MAP Center and Executive Director of the Great Lakes Equity Center and Dr. Seena Skelton, Director of Operations for the MAP Center.

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Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Kathleen and Seena, we want to welcome you to the first Anti-Racism Vodcast Series, welcome.

Dr. Seena Skelton: Thank you, Tiffany, and Nickie. I am so excited about this Vodcast Series and very happy to be a part of the kick-off episode.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: So, I'm going to move us into really two reflective prompts that we just wanted to pose to the both of you, in no particular order but I'll just start with the first question: *Why is a vodcast series of anti-racist practices important?* And then secondly: *What does anti-racism mean to the MAP Center?* I'll just open it up and we can—we can jump right in.

Dr. Seena Skelton: Great, I'll kick us off with that first question—

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Okay.

Dr. Seena Skelton: —and the question of why I think is a really important question. It provides us a rationale and—and a motivation for—for why we're engaging in these kinds of discussions and also really a beacon for what we want to strive for. And you know, we've lived through this past year of facing many, many challenges and for many people, particularly many people who possess dominant identities, many of the events or occurrences that either they've personally experienced or witnessed over the course of time via various different media outlets, social media and electronic media have brought to surface what many of us who embody minoritized identities have known since our sort of existence in this particular space; that we live in a racialized society. That every day we navigate systems that are racist systems. We experience racism and racist encounters from the policies that affect our lives, from the practices, and instruction structures that we navigate and from interactions with people that we know that we love that are friends and also people that are acquaintances. And what has been, I think really kind of frustrating for—for us is this kind of maybe new realization and many of our colleagues

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and friends have experienced that—that racism is a thing right that—that racism exists. And while I think we're there's—there's a sense of yes and—and—and confirmation that yes what we've been sharing with you all along is—is reality from for most of us and that now you—you have witnessed this reality you experienced this reality it is also frustrating for us. Because it's like: “Okay now—now you're ready to sort of engage in this in this conversation.” And so, it's an important, critically important conversation to have, what is racism? But more importantly I think what does it mean to be anti-racist? And for me personally, I'll find the—the characterization of this concept of anti-racism—anti-racist I find that it has a lot of utility because it helps me understand and engage in dialogue with people that again I know and love who have exhibited and engaged in the racist behavior but are not bad people, right?

Dr. Seena Skelton: And I think this is sort of the—the conflation that many of us have that if you are engaging in racist you know, rhetoric or discourse or behavior, interactions, or policies that you are in fact a bad person. And—and I know many people I love and care about who have espoused racist sentiments, who have engaged in and supported racist policies but they—I would not—they are not bad people, these are people that I—that are good people—people that I know, people that I love and care about. And so, this sort of reframe of this idea of what does it mean to be anti-racist and anti-racism is more of a moment-to-moment decision and action as opposed to a state of—a state of being the static and either you are a racist or you are not that—that sort of hampers the conversation from moving forward. And so, when we begin to think about a re-framing this notion of engaging in—in behaviors or interactions that—that are racist versus then engaging in behaviors, interactions that are anti-racist meaning that you're actively engaged in action that would counteract the stratification of humans in hierarchy, classification of humans based on racialized identities, that provides a lot of utility for people to begin to have a conversation and move forward. And so, I think these conversations are important. I think they are timely I—I think that there's a window that has opened to engage people who may not have seen this conversation as being or perceive this conversation as being relevant for them now. They see the relevance and it's—it's certainly time to sort of seize

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this time to—to engage people and call people into this very important conversation that then leads to very important actions.

Dr. Kathleen King Thorius: Thanks Seena. You had a number of comments that were really resonating for me. One—the first thing I want to do is acknowledge the leadership your leadership at the MAP Center as the Director of Operations and leading our Center through these conversations and also emphasizing in your earlier comments that we all hold different intersecting identities and even within our Center and you can see on the screen we show up differently in spaces. And so, it is important to acknowledge that. And you talked about the importance of recognizing that for those who hold non-dominant, minoritized racial identities you have been saying and experiencing from the minute you show up in a space and in the space of the world that racism is a crucial, if not the most crucial social issue that needs to be addressed and disrupted and undone. And—so I speak from a position of being in a dominant racial identity at other identity intersections but as a white woman, white, cis woman who's non-disabled. And I want to point that out in terms of the resources of a vodcast, you know, many of us right now are having these conversations in this kind of a format or even if it's with family we might be showing up on a FaceTime or a Zoom or and a lot of us are engaging in social media in ways that may be elevated or different from before. And so, these conversations about race racism and anti-racism are happening more and more frequently in these online spaces and so why now? Part of it is so that this conversation can serve as a resource for any of—any folks who are perceiving this via an online forum that can be shared, discussed, grappled with, taken apart, critiqued with your friends, family, and colleagues. So, as at the MAP Center, we've been moving, continuing to move into these online spaces to provide these kinds of resources that are accessible also in—in multiple formats so that they serve the function of being relevant for people wherever and whenever they're able to use them.

Dr. Kathleen King Thorius: The second piece I want to emphasize is regarding, also acknowledging sort of the parallel point that Seena made that as white, non-disabled, cis

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woman, I and white people are socialized into racialized belief systems and racist policies, practices, and belief systems. And so, again as people are engaging in these spaces, we need resources to be able to sustain our attention to how we've benefited from those as white people, how we have perpetuated, and how we need to sustain our efforts to disrupt those kinds of our racist systems in our schools, and in our society, in our communities, and in our families. And also, finally, this idea that Seena also touched on about, and we can see this paralleled in social media, like if you think about—and I'll ask my white colleagues or friends and family here who might be participating you know, when you post a picture of your puppy or your child the ways in which you get likes and loves and smiles and cares but when you post something about anti-racist practice belief systems or calling out or calling in racist activities, actions, belief systems, the silence—the silence is so perceivable. And so, this idea about anti-racism not being silenced, not being neutrality, pushing beyond the comfort the white comfort of neutrality and silence to maintain and sustain efforts to understand and disrupt the ways that racism impacts our lives in the ways that we produce racism. So, thanks for that opportunity to build on Seena's thoughts.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Yeah. Kathleen or Seena any other thoughts or shares around this idea of anti-racist activity, around why—why the MAP Center feels like engaging this vodcast series is important beyond what you've—you've shared already. Any other final thoughts or any key takeaways that you feel like you would challenge us either viewing or listening to consider.

Dr. Seena Skelton: Yeah. Thank you, Tiffany. And this is really connecting Kathleen to what you—what you just shared and the importance of—we talk about this a lot in our Center, the use of tools and how tools really mediate new learning, and that learning is really mediated by the various different tools that we employ in different spaces. And so, the idea that the conversation in discourse is a tool, right? The way—how we talk about things and how we talk about how we're talking about things is a is a tool to extend and expand learning. But also, in a very pragmatic sense a vodcast series such as this can be used in local spaces as a tool to do a

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couple of things. One, to model, right? There's often you know, looking at a model of people talking about these challenging topics it's—it can be a very strong tool. Just today we were talking about a request that came to us and just an educator wanting to know: “How do we talk about this in our space? Like, we're struggling with—with—with engaging in these kinds of conversations, we want to have them but we're—we're—we're sort of tentative about where to begin.” And so, a vodcast series such as this can provide some modeling for these kinds of conversations. And so, I—I really like the idea of—of how we think about the vodcast series as a professional learning tool and how it can be leveraged as a professional learning tool in various different professional learning spaces.

Nickie Coomer: And not just professional learning spaces but personal learning spaces. So, you know as you and Kathleen were both talking like you said stimulating these conversations and then offering this conversation and the conversations that we'll be having over the course of this series as objects of discussion for other folks you know. To surface topics and to introduce maybe vocabulary and then and give tools and to provide some—some ways and some means and some stimulation for—for encouraging and sustaining anti-racism in our personal and professional lives.

Dr. Seena Skelton: I was just struck by this—this notion that—that white people benefit from racism, which is true. And if you're—so if I were a white person, I might say, “Well...,” whether I say this consciously or not, “Well if I'm being—if this has benefit—this is helpful to me why would I really want to dismantle it, if it's really helpful to me, right?” The whole interest—self-interest thing, but it's not really for most white people it's not really helpful for them either. It is to and to a degree but not to the degree that they think it is, right? And so, but that is—that is unpacking a lot. I don't know, it's too layered so maybe I'll just save that sound bite for a different 20-minute conversation.

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Dr. Seena Skelton: While we talk a lot about the how white people benefit from racism, the racism hurts white people too you know, right? So, this whole notion of like sort of interest and it's really in the best interest of our people but including white people—people who possess dominant identities that to engage in anti-racism and to dismantle racism. Because really no one benefits from racism, right? You know—you know what I mean like racism is—racism is a bad thing, and no one benefits from it. There—people are able to—are afforded particular privileges but for the most part racism is harmful to everyone.

Dr. Kathleen King Thorius: I really appreciate the point that you're making though, Seena. The only thing I'll add now because I know this is supposed to be 20 minutes is the focus for the MAP Center on anti-racism as a call to action and we want to make the—to distinguish between context and action. So, Equity Assistance Centers have been around for a long time, and I hope elsewhere you'll learn about the work of the Equity Assistance Center network, but equity is describing a context, a particular experience, or context. And Seena was talking about before and Nickie had mentioned, we at the Center utilize tools to support and to facilitate the achievement and the continuous work toward the achievement of equitable contexts and experiences. But anti-racism is a call to action. It requires movement. It requires sustained perpetuated movement and change. And that for me evokes a different way that we can think about our work at the MAP Center as being dynamic, as being committed, and as being well-resourced toward disrupting racism in our schools and our society.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Yeah. Thank you, thank you for that. And thank you both, Seena, and Kathleen, for sharing how the MAP Center positions resources and tools to stimulate those type of shifts and in moving towards more equitable context using anti-racist and other forms of anti-oppressive activity. But in the context of this conversation, we want to situate, very squarely and overtly, anti-racist activity, so thank you for that.

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Nickie Coomer: Alright, so I would love to thank you both as well. I appreciate the context and I'm excited to share this vodcast and get it out into the world to you know so that people can listen and have their own conversations in their own spaces. And before we close out though, I do want to point to a few of our resources that we've developed at the MAP Center that are related to—to anti-racism. So, I encourage our—our viewers to stop by our website at greatlakesequity.org and visit our online equity resource library. They'll find there a few different titles on our anti-racism webpage one of which is our Equilearn Webinar “Ensuring Every Student Succeeds: Understanding and Redressing Intersecting Oppressions of Racism, Sexism, and Classism.” As well as our Equity Digest entitled “Race Matters in School.”

Nickie Coomer: So again, for our viewers, please stop by our website and you'll find an array of resources that are sure to be helpful to you in both your professional and personal lives. So also, I want to encourage our—our listeners and our viewers to follow us on social media. So, we are on Facebook as the Great Lakes Equity Center/The Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center as well as on twitter at @GreatLakesEAC. So, if you'd like to engage with us, we'd love to hear from you, answer: “*How are you going to use what you learned today?*” And again, tweet us @GreatLakesEAC, hashtag #MAPequity.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Yeah, thank you, Nickie. And I just want to offer just a special thank you, thank you to Seena and Kathleen for joining us on our kickoff of our Anti-racism Vodcast Series. We deeply appreciate your perspective, your—your thought and consideration and care, your leadership of the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center. So, just thank you for being here, thank you for what you do, and thank you for what you have put out for—for all of us to consider and to reflect and hopefully enact, so thank you.

Nickie Coomer: This resource was brought to you by the Midwest and Plains Equity Center to find out about other Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance resources visit our website at www.greatlakesequity.org. To subscribe our publications, click on the "subscribe to our

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