

SPEAKING OF RACE



Ijeoma Oluo talks about her book “So You Want to Talk About Race,”
— a tool to turn uncomfortable conversations into productive ones

BY LISA EDGE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Ijeoma Oluo’s book “So You Want to Talk About Race” is a no-nonsense, straightforward guide to understanding the complexities of race in America. Oluo

covers a lot of ground within chapters titled, “Is it really about race?”, “Why can’t I touch your hair?”, “Why can’t I say the n-word?” and “I just got called racist; what do I do now?” She blends her personal experiences as a black woman with research into a precise picture

that’s easy to follow. Oluo’s book debut goes beyond a publication one reads to gain knowledge on how to begin the work of being anti-racist; “So You Want to Talk About Race” can also be used as a tool to turn uncomfortable conversations about race into productive ones.

Oluo is a Seattle writer, speaker and internet yeller. She gained national attention with a profile of Rachel Dolezal published in *The Stranger* last April. She is editor-at-large



Ijeoma Oluo

at *The Establishment*. *Seattle Magazine* named her “one of the most influential people” in 2017, and she was recently awarded the 2018 Feminist Humanist Award by the American Humanist Society.

In August, Oluo comes to Portland as part of the Willamette Writers Conference, Aug. 3-5, at the Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel.

Oluo is a mother of two and the daughter of a white mother from the Midwest and a Nigerian father. Her food blog transitioned into a place for her to write about her fears for her community and family. She lost white friends along the way, but those blog posts gained attention from people across the country and online publishers. Seal Press released her book in January. It has since become a *New York Times* bestseller. We spoke with Oluo about her book, her relationship with her mother and her Facebook makeup tutorials (she loves wearing blush).

Lisa Edge: *How has your life changed since the release of your book in January?*

Ijeoma Oluo: I’d say it’s changed a lot and also not at all. Definitely changed as far as the work, the type of work I’m doing right now. I’m spending a lot of time

traveling and speaking. A lot less time writing because I don’t have the time for it. But, you know, at the end of the day I’m still a single mom with two kids. I have this whole section of home life that kind of has to stay the same because I have kids who still expect rides to taekwondo and, you know, food and all those other things that children expect without much care for what your workload looks like (laughs).

L.E.: *One of the things that’s great about following you on Twitter and Facebook is the window we get into your personal life, which I think helps engender connectedness. Do you think you’ve shared too much?*

I.O.: I’m constantly re-evaluating and adjusting. I definitely don’t think I share quite the same way I used to. I know it seems like I share a lot, but a lot of what I end up sharing ends up being like light quips or funny things that happen in a day. But I know that, especially when it comes to my kids, what I do share has definitely tightened down. You know, before, when social media was just my space to connect with friends and community, it was different as far as what I’d talk about what my kids

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