Sources of Resistance

(Taken from Talking about Race... by Beverly Daniel Tatum)

Here are 3 major sources of resistance (particularly among Whites) in talking/learning about race and racism.

1. **Race is considered a taboo topic for discussion especially in racially mixed settings**
   a. Even young children see racial difference
   b. Whites often feel confusion, anxiety, fear when thinking about race-related memories

2. **Many people, regardless of color have been socialized to think the US is a just society**
   a. We think people are fairly rewarded in our world
   b. Saying we have a system of advantage creates discomfort in students
   c. Students then have to learn wide-spread impact of racism on society

3. **Many people, particularly Whites, initially deny any personal prejudice, recognizing the impact of racism on other people’s lives, but fail to acknowledge how it impacts their own**
   a. We have to understand that White people benefit from the system
   b. Whites in position of “oppressor” which creates discomfort

**What does resistance look like?**

1. Body language: arms crossed, closed off, “I don’t want to be here”
2. Lack of eye-contact: with speaker, other members, constantly on phone or engaging in side conversations
3. Lateness or excessive absences
4. No participation
5. No feelings about what is going on. E.g. “It doesn’t bother me”, “I never think about that”.
6. Explosions, yelling, running out of the room.
How do we overcome resistance?

1. Acknowledge that resistance is a normal, natural part of the racial reconciliation process and that it will emerge for everyone (including instructors) in the room at one point or another.
2. Re-evaluate commitment and what is expected from participants when resistance comes up. E.g. you may take some space for yourself, but you must speak to why you are taking 5 minutes and you must re-engage.
3. Sit with your feelings. Say “I’m catching a feeling” and take some time to be silent and reflect on your process, then share.
4. Appreciations/completion of goals. Always make room for reflection so that everyone knows how far they have traveled.