



What Can You Say?: America's National Conversation on Race

John Hartigan Jr.

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We are in a transitional moment in our national conversation on race. "Despite optimistic predictions that Barack Obama's election would signal the end of race as an issue in America, the race-related news stories just keep coming. Race remains a political and polarizing issue, and the sprawling, unwieldy, and often maddening means we have developed to discuss and evaluate what counts as "racial" can be frustrating. In *What Can You Say?*, John Hartigan Jr. examines a watershed year of news stories, taking these events as a way to understand American culture and challenge our existing notions of what is racial—or not. The book follows race stories that have made news headlines—including Don Imus's remarks about the Rutgers women's basketball team, protests in Jena, Louisiana, and Barack Obama's presidential campaign—to trace the shifting contours of mainstream U.S. public discussions of race as they incorporate new voices, words, and images. Focused on the underlying dynamics of American culture that shape this conversation, this book aims to make us more fluent in assessing the stories we consume about race. Advancing our conversation on race hinges on recognizing and challenging the cultural conventions governing the ways we speak about and recognize race. In drawing attention to this curious cultural artifact, our national conversation on race, Hartigan ultimately offers a way to understand race in the totality of American culture, as a constantly evolving debate. As this book demonstrates, the conversation is far from over.

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