UNDERSTANDING AND AVOIDING MICROAGGRESSIONS RELATED TO RACE AND IDENTITY

"You're so articulate."
The problem: Implies surprise that someone of a specific race or identity is intelligent or well-spoken.
Better option: Don't make comments like this at all.

"I don't see color."
The problem: This negates — and attempts to dismiss — the reality that racial discrimination exists and significantly impacts many people's lives.
Better option: Acknowledge racial disparities and encourage respectful dialogue exploring related issues.

"What are you?" or "Where are you from?"
The problem: Frames the person as an outsider or someone who doesn't belong.
Better option: If you are truly interested in someone's background, ask non-offensive questions like "What did you like most about your childhood home?" or "What are some of your favorite family traditions?" You could also start by sharing something about yourself like, "Let's get to know one another. I'm (share background, experience, etc.). Please tell me about yourself."

"Your name is too hard to pronounce, can I just call you [this]?"
The problem: Someone's name is a core part of their identity and may even have familial or cultural significance. Trivializing the importance of their name implies a lack of concern about erasing their identity.
Better option: Commit to learning the person's name and pronouncing it correctly. Research online tools that can help.

"You don't look like you're [race/identity]."
The problem: The way this is often framed as a compliment — as in, "Wow, I would have never guessed you were [race/identity]!" — implies that you expect a person of that identity to stand out or look a certain noticeably different way that's not necessarily flattering.
Better option: Don't make comments like this at all.

"You take care of the math portion of the assignment. You're probably good at that."
The problem: Buys into stereotypes that certain genders or races are better at math and science.
Better option: "Let's each identify our strengths to determine how to tackle the project."

"Is that your real hair?"
The problem: This implies that certain people are incapable of having certain hairstyles/lengths, and it alienates someone who may have a medical condition.
Better option: "I really like your hairstyle," or "That style looks great on you."

"What does your [spouse of a different gender] do?"
The problem: This assumes that the person is in a heterosexual relationship and has a spouse.
Better option: Do not inquire about a person's partner unless they bring it up, then respect their pronouns.