

White Fragility



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ROBIN DIANGELO

DiAngelo was born into a white working-class family in San Jose, California. Her parents divorced when she was two years old, and her family subsequently fell into poverty. Her mother died when DiAngelo was 10 years old, after which time she and her sisters went to live with their father. DiAngelo then earned a B.A. in Sociology and History from Seattle University in 1991, followed by a Ph.D. in multicultural education from the University of Washington in 2004. Since then, DiAngelo has published numerous academic articles and books on race, privilege, and education. Her first book, co-written with Ozlem Sensoy, is called *Is Everyone Really Equal?* in 2017. In 2018, she wrote *White Fragility*, which became a *New York Times* bestseller. DiAngelo has also worked in providing diversity training for businesses for 20 years. Currently, DiAngelo is an Affiliate Associate Professor of Education at the University of Washington, Seattle.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

White Fragility discusses white supremacy and racism from the United States's conception. In the 18th century, as the United States was being founded, the Founding Fathers had to reconcile their ideals of equality and the reality of Africans' enslavement and the Indigenous people's genocide. As a result, Thomas Jefferson posited that there were natural differences between the races and that people of color were inherently inferior to white people, relieving the founders of having to treat people equally (and providing them with massive economic benefit). DiAngelo goes on to discuss different historical examples of white supremacy and discrimination throughout history: slavery, Indian Removal Acts in the mid-1800s, Jim Crow laws in the late 19th and early 20th century, Japanese American internment in the 1940s, and continued practices like redlining, discrimination in education and hiring, racist media representations, and mass incarceration. DiAngelo also discusses how the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s changed people's perceptions of racism in the U.S. Watching Black people brutalized on television, white people did not want to be associated with these acts of extreme violence, and so it became much less acceptable for white people to openly profess racial superiority. But as a result, people associated racism exclusively with bad people, and so became much less likely to admit to it themselves and more likely to react with the defensiveness. That racism and white supremacy persist today is one of the reasons for DiAngelo's book. As mass

incarceration and police brutality against people of color (especially Black people) became more visible and widely discussed, the need to address systemic racism only grew. DiAngelo's book comes at a period of renewed interest in examining and remedying systemic racism, particularly with the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement in the mid-2010s and the protests following George Floyd's death in 2020.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

DiAngelo cites many historians and writers on race, including Ta-Nehisi Coates (specifically *Between the World and Me*), Ibram X. Kendi (*Stamped from the Beginning*), Charles W. Mills (*The Racial Contract*), Carol Anderson (*White Rage* and *One Person, No Vote*), Michelle Alexander (*The New Jim Crow*), James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Kimberlé Crenshaw. Other books that focus on racism include Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider*, Austin Channing Brown's *I'm Still Here*, and Wesley Lowery's *They Can't Kill Us All* (which tracks the history of the Black Lives Matter movement). Contemporary books that discuss racial discourse and anti-racism practices include Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, Ijeoma Oluo's *So You Want to Talk About Race*, Leslie Houts Picca's *Two-Faced Racism*, and Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist*. DiAngelo has also written another book on racism in social justice education called *Is Everyone Really Equal?*

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*
- **When Written:** 2011–2018
- **Where Written:** Seattle, Washington
- **When Published:** 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction, American History and Politics, Self-Improvement
- **Antagonist:** Racism; white supremacy
- **Point of View:** First person from DiAngelo's point of view

EXTRA CREDIT

A Popular Primer. *White Fragility* spent over two years on *The New York Times* nonfiction bestseller list.

Preferred Words. DiAngelo coined the term “white fragility” in 2011 in a paper for the *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* before using it as the subject of her book.



PLOT SUMMARY

In *White Fragility's* introduction, author and educator Robin DiAngelo establishes that white people in the United States live in a deeply unequal society and benefit from that inequality. When white people's positions are challenged, or when this inequality is merely named in any way, white people view it as an attack on their character. In other words, it's perceived as a challenge to their identities as good, moral people, and they get defensive, guilty, angry, afraid, and often silent as a result. But by reacting in this manner, white people restore their own comfort and deflect from the issue of race, maintaining the racial hierarchy. This concept is what DiAngelo calls "white fragility," the title of her book, and she emphasizes that white people must be willing to combat these reactions in order to disrupt racism.

White people have a difficult time admitting that being white affects their perspective because of several misleading ideologies, including individualism and objectivity. Individualism holds that all people are unique and have no commonalities even among social groups, and objectivity holds that it is possible to be free from bias—neither of which, DiAngelo argues, are actually true. For example, one man in DiAngelo's workshop argues that white people can experience racism, citing how Italian Americans were once discriminated against. But DiAngelo points out that Italians were able to assimilate into white American society, and that has affected him a great deal because he works for a company whose employees are overwhelmingly white.

Many people believe that there are biological differences between the races, but in reality, different races were established in order to justify the genocide and enslavement of African and Indigenous people during the United States' founding. If they believed that Black and Indigenous people were inherently inferior, white people did not have to treat them equally.

Racism is different from prejudice (thoughts, feelings, and stereotypes) and discrimination (action based on prejudice). Racism requires legal authority and institutional control, which is why white people cannot experience racism, because they have always had the legal authority and institutional control over people of color.

Many people associate white supremacy with extremism or violence, but the term white supremacy also captures the assumed superiority of white people and the practices that result from that assumption. It is the overarching political, economic, and social system of white people's domination—it's not just overt acts of violence or extremism perpetrated by hateful individuals. Examples of white supremacy include how white people control most of the wealth in the United States, how they create narratives about themselves and others in the

media, and how white neighborhoods and schools are often seen as "better" than those with mostly people of color.

DiAngelo explains that people's conception of racism has changed over time. Following the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream Speech," people believed that merely naming race was racist, and therefore "color-blind" ideology became prominent. White people pretended not to see race, believing that doing so would solve racism. But this method ignores the very real biases that people of color face. White people also use coded language in order to talk about race without directly naming it—a "good" or "sheltered" neighborhood general refers to a white neighborhood, while a "sketchy" one often refers to a predominantly nonwhite neighborhood. White people also rarely hold each other accountable for incidents of racism, comforted by the fact that they are not the ones who told a racist joke or story, for example. Yet they tacitly endorse this behavior by remaining silent, and are given social capital (like seeming fun, or being part of the team) in return for remaining silent in the face of racism rather than calling it out. This, DiAngelo says, is white solidarity.

Prior to the civil rights movement, it was socially acceptable for white people to openly proclaim their superiority. But when white people saw Black men, women, and children brutally attacked by police dogs and fire hoses, they didn't want to be connected with these acts of extreme violence. As a result, they associated racism only with immoral, violent people, while good people could not be racist. Because of this, any accusation of racism is read as a character assassination, and white people get angry and defensive at those accusations. But in reality, racism is not a binary and everyone—even good people—can and do hold prejudices. Thus, people should welcome feedback so that they can work to change their behavior.

Most of the time, however, people respond to accusations of racist behavior with white fragility, and DiAngelo illustrates several examples of the white fragility she observes in her workshops. Some people are silent and believe that they "can't say anything anymore." But this kind of statement only shows that white people believe others are too sensitive, rather than honestly examining why their statements might cause offense. DiAngelo also notes that when white women cry—whether in sympathy over racism or because they are personally receiving feedback on racist behavior—everyone's attention turns to consoling them instead of focusing on racism. Thus, in this way, white fragility helps maintain white supremacy because it deflects the discussion away from how to interrupt racism and often positions white people as victims. But DiAngelo emphasizes that it is more important to focus on interrupting white supremacy than maintaining the appearance of not being racist.

In DiAngelo's final chapter, she models how to *not* react with white fragility in discussing an incident between her and a web

developer her company hired named Angela. DiAngelo makes an offhand comment about her Black coworker Deborah's hair, and later she hears that Angela, who is Black, thought the comment was inappropriate. DiAngelo processes her feelings with another white person (as to not burden a person of color with her feelings), apologizes to Angela for her racist remarks, asks for further feedback, and makes honest efforts to remedy her behavior in the future. As a result, she and Angela are able to build a stronger relationship going forward. This exchange illustrates DiAngelo's main point that it is more important for white people to own up to their inevitable racism and work to change it rather than try to convince others that they do not have racist behavior in the first place, and DiAngelo models the best way to do that. Otherwise, white people acting as they always have will simply maintain the racial inequality that DiAngelo has outlined throughout the book.



CHARACTERS

Robin DiAngelo – Robin DiAngelo is the author and narrator of *White Fragility*. DiAngelo is a white woman raised in the United States and an educator on issues of racial and social justice. Throughout the book, she describes different workshops—usually held in workplaces—that she has led on understanding and combatting racism. Over time, she observed common patterns among white participants: namely, how they used silence, guilt, anger, or denial as a way to deflect from discussions of race and prove that they are not bad people. This led her to develop the ideas in *White Fragility*, as white supremacy and white people's institutional privileges have made it difficult for them to talk about race because it questions that position. DiAngelo also uses her own background growing up in poverty to discuss white privilege and white fragility. She notes that while she experienced classism, she was not also experiencing racism at the same time, and she was better off than her peers of color because her identity as a white woman gave her an inherent sense of belonging in academic institutions, for example. Thus, she recognizes her privilege as a white person. In addition, she talks about an incident with a new web developer at her company named Angela. When she makes an off-hand comment about her Black co-worker Deborah's hair in front of Angela, DiAngelo later learns that Angela was offended by her comment. Rather than reacting with white fragility, DiAngelo processes her feelings separately, owns her racist behavior, asks Angela for further feedback, and works to change her behavior. In this way, DiAngelo shows that even white people who are engaged in anti-racist practices can still exhibit racism, and she models the best way to respond to feedback. Only by acknowledging one's discomfort and owning it rather than reacting with white fragility, DiAngelo suggests, can people disrupt racism on an individual level.

Angela – Angela, a Black woman, is a new web developer at DiAngelo's company. When DiAngelo dismisses a survey that Angela made and makes an off-hand comment about her Black co-worker Deborah's hair, Angela tells another member of DiAngelo's team that she thought the comment was inappropriate. DiAngelo processes her feelings with another white person, apologizes to Angela for her racist comment, and asks Angela for further feedback. Angela says that while these kinds of dynamics occur every day, she is pleasantly surprised by DiAngelo's openness to feedback, her willingness to repair the relationship, and her commitment to doing better in the future. As a result, they have a stronger relationship, illustrating how resisting white fragility when receiving feedback about racist behavior can help build more authentic cross-racial relationships.

Mr. Roberts – Mr. Roberts is a white teacher with whom DiAngelo is asked to consult after he makes an inappropriate comment to a Black female student. In one of their sessions, he talks about how a white colleague called another Black student "girl," and the student took offense. Telling this story, Mr. Roberts laments that he can't "say anything anymore," positioning himself as a victim. DiAngelo notes that he sides with the colleague despite the fact that he has problematic behavior, and he seems completely uninterested in the student's perspective. Because he reacts with white fragility and believes the student to be in the wrong, Mr. Roberts becomes more close-minded rather than open and willing to work on his racist behavior.

Deborah – Deborah, a Black woman, is one of DiAngelo's co-workers. When traveling for work, DiAngelo suggested that they go to a rural part of northern Idaho for a relaxing weekend. Deborah notes that the town is near a place where the Aryan Nation—a white supremacist group—is building a compound, and in addition to that, Deborah does not want to be in an all-white environment. This exchange underscores how white supremacy is ingrained in the society, as DiAngelo doesn't think twice about where to go and feels an innate sense of belonging, while Deborah has much less freedom of movement as a Black woman.

Eva – Eva is a white German woman who attends one of DiAngelo's volunteer workshops. When she argues that she is exempt from racism because there were no Black people in Germany, DiAngelo pushes back by saying that Eva probably absorbed some stereotypes from media about African countries growing up and/or during the 23 years she has lived in the United States. Eva reacts furiously, which is an example of white fragility.

TERMS

Affirmative Action – Affirmative action refers to a set of laws

and policies in the U.S. enacted in the late 1960s designed to prevent discrimination in hiring. Affirmative action only applies to state and government agencies (not private companies), and only requires employers to articulate why they didn't hire a qualified person of color. Affirmative action has been systematically dismantled (many states have done away with it altogether), but white people often hold up affirmative action as a reason they are discriminated against. According to **DiAngelo**, this is a form of white fragility because it positions white people as victims despite the centuries of injustice in hiring against people of color and especially Black people.

Habitus – A term coined by anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, habitus refers to the way people perceive the world around them and react to it. These behaviors are often based on a person's "field" (environment) and "capital" (the social value a person holds in that environment). **DiAngelo** uses habitus to explain white fragility, arguing that when white people find themselves in an unfamiliar social position (e.g., being questioned about racism or racist behavior), they use white fragility to restore their social comfort. In this way, white fragility is a kind of habitus that white people use to navigate uncomfortable conversations of race.

White Fragility – White fragility refers to the way in which white people react with anger, defensiveness, guilt, or silence when confronted on issues of race. The book argues that white fragility is a tool of white supremacy, because it often deflects from issues of race and in doing so, maintains the racial status quo in a way that benefits white people.

White Supremacy – White supremacy is a term that describes white people's assumed centrality and superiority, as well as the practices that result from this assumption. Manifestations of white supremacy include the fact that white people are viewed as the norm in society, white people's institutional economic and political dominance, and white people's ability to shape and disseminate narratives about people of color.

perpetuate white supremacy and racism, because they prevent white people from honestly examining and disrupting racist behavior and systems. Thus, DiAngelo suggests that the crucial first step in dismantling systemic racism and white supremacy is through white people's acknowledgement that they are complicit in those systems and sitting with that discomfort rather than reacting with white fragility.

Because white people are so unused to viewing themselves in terms of race, talking about race can trigger a range of emotions for them—all of which recenter white people and consequently take the focus off of remedying racist behavior. In the many workplace diversity training workshops that DiAngelo runs, she speaks about how white people hold social and institutional power over people of color. In one instance, a white man pounds his fist on the table in reaction to this statement, yelling about how a white person can't get a job anymore. This is despite the fact that in the workshop, 38 of the 40 employees are white. The man's anger positions white people as victims, even though white people clearly have an advantage in obtaining jobs at the company. Such reactions to confronting racial bias "repel the challenge, return [their] racial comfort, and maintain [their] dominance within the racial hierarchy." The man's reaction deflects from the fact that he might be complicit in white supremacy so that he doesn't have to confront any discomfort.

Many white women in DiAngelo's workshops, when receiving feedback about racism or even when simply confronting injustice, cry in response. In one workshop, a white woman tries to explain her Black colleague's feelings. When DiAngelo's Black co-facilitator points out that speaking for the colleague is problematic—as it assumes that she, as a white woman, can speak best for a Black man—the woman begins to cry. As a result, all of the attention goes to her, "demanding the time, energy, and attention from everyone in the room," while her Black colleague's point is entirely lost in the discussion. This is another example of how white fragility, defensiveness, and discomfort deflect from addressing racism.

White fragility also prevents white people from holding each other accountable for racism, which again only enables white people to perpetuate that racism. "White solidarity" is the concept that white people are often silent about racism with one another. This is an aspect of white fragility because it is more uncomfortable for white people to challenge other white people's racism than to disrupt white supremacy. For example, when an uncle says something racially offensive at a dinner, everyone cringes, but no one challenges him because nobody wants to "ruin" the dinner. But choosing silence over discomfort enables racist behavior and comments. Other examples include inappropriate workplace jokes. People often avoid confronting others over racist behavior so they are not seen as "angry, humorless, combative, and not suited to go far." Conversely, keeping quiet about racism is rewarded with social capital like



THEMES

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WHITE FRAGILITY

Author and educator Robin DiAngelo defines "white fragility"—the book's central topic—as the way in which white people react with anger, guilt, or denial when faced with the realities of racism and white supremacy. But as DiAngelo explains, these reactions center white people's feelings in conversations about race and only

being seen as “fun, cooperative, and a team player.” However, silence tacitly gives permission to people to perpetuate racist behavior and maintains white supremacy.

In contrast, DiAngelo offers an experience of having her own racism pointed out to illustrate how owning her discomfort and racist behavior helped her remedy that behavior and build stronger relationships with people of color. DiAngelo makes an off-hand comment about her Black colleague Deborah’s hair to another Black woman named Angela, whom DiAngelo has only just met. A few days later, a teammate tells DiAngelo that Angela found her comment inappropriate. DiAngelo is upset that she offended Angela, but she takes the time to reflect on the criticism and talks about the situation with another white person so as not to burden Angela or another person of color with her feelings. DiAngelo resists defensiveness, owns her racism, apologizes to Angela, and accepts additional feedback. In this way, DiAngelo is able to build a stronger relationship with Angela and avoids the same mistake in the future. Resisting white fragility helps her to disrupt racism rather than perpetuate it. DiAngelo writes, “authentic antiracism is rarely comfortable. Discomfort is key to my growth and thus desirable.” While the incident with Angela made her uncomfortable and embarrassed, she stresses that it is more important for her—and all white people—to own that discomfort rather than deflect it in order to learn and grow in the future.

As white people learn to become less defensive about race, this in turn helps people of color feel more open about giving feedback. In a workshop, DiAngelo asked a participant, a man of color, what it would be like if he could simply give white people feedback on problematic behavior and have white people graciously receive it, reflect on it, and work to change their behavior. The man replied, “it would be revolutionary.” Resisting white fragility is an important first step that would then allow white people to examine deeper forms of systemic bias. But none of that examination is possible without first overcoming white fragility’s deflecting tactics.



WHITE SUPREMACY

White supremacy refers to white people’s centrality and assumed superiority in society, and how this positioning has led to overarching political, economic, and social systems dominated by white people. But white supremacy isn’t only the foundation of historical systems like slavery or segregation—it still has a large impact on society today. In showing how white supremacy has evolved over time, *White Fragility* illustrates how white people continue to benefit from and perpetuate the dynamics of white supremacy. The difference between the past and the present, however, is that white supremacy goes largely unnamed today.

Originally, white supremacy was used to justify non-white people’s oppression in the United States and subsequently led

to further oppression and inequality. Race itself is a function of white supremacy: as the United States was being founded, the Founding Fathers had to reconcile the conflicting ideologies that all people are created equal alongside African enslavement and Indigenous people’s genocide and displacement. Thus, the Founding Fathers—and particularly Thomas Jefferson—suggested the idea that people of other races were inferior and used that reasoning to substantiate their exploitation. DiAngelo highlights a long list of examples of political and economic policies that followed from white supremacy: “246 years of brutal enslavement; the rape of black women for the pleasure of white men and to produce more enslaved workers; the selling off of black children; the attempted genocide of Indigenous people, Indian removal acts, and reservations; indentured servitude, lynching, and mob violence; [...] employment discrimination; educational discrimination; inferior schools; biased laws and policing practices; redlining and subprime mortgages; mass incarceration; racist media representations,” and the list goes on. These are just a few examples of different policies based on the belief that white people were superior that then put people of color at an even greater political and economic disadvantage. In this way, white supremacy creates self-fulfilling narratives and policies.

Even when the inequitable government-sanctioned institutions of slavery and segregation ended, white supremacy adapted and still plays a major role in politics, economics, and media today. In the present, DiAngelo cites these statistics for 2016–2017: the 10 richest Americans were 100 percent white; members of Congress, 90 percent white; governors, 96 percent white; the Cabinet, 91 percent white; and teachers, 82 percent white. News producers were 85 percent white; book publishers, 90 percent white; TV producers, 93 percent white; and music producers, 95 percent white. All of these statistics illustrate that white people still dominate in terms of wealth, power, and the narratives that society consumes, though society is only just beginning to reckon with trying to remedy this inequality. White people’s power continues reinforces the success that certain people or institutions can have. Media representations are particularly important: for example, in 2016, 95 of the top 100 films worldwide were directed by white men. Their representations of other groups of people are “extremely narrow and problematic, and yet they are reinforced over and over.” Thus, the existing power structure, dominated by white men, also influences how the world perceives people of color while consumers are largely unaware of this fact. DiAngelo points out that “race will influence whether we will survive our birth, where we are most likely to live, which schools we will attend, who our friends and partners will be, what careers we will have, how much money we will earn, how healthy we will be, and even how long we can expect to live.” Thus, white supremacy continues to have a massive effect on people’s lives, even though it largely goes unnamed as

a political force.

One of the most pernicious aspects of white supremacy in its current form is that it is often inconspicuous—allowing people to perpetuate racism through coded language and actions. Neighborhoods with a non-white majority, in which white people might be a racial minority, are often presented as “scary, dangerous, or ‘sketchy.’” By contrast, white neighborhoods are often described “good, safe, sheltered, clean, desirable.” This language is coded in such a way that people know it’s really about race. Yet none of these descriptors inherently calls out race, allowing people to maintain plausible deniability about the subject of their discussion. They can maintain a positive self-image (because they don’t have to admit to racial prejudice) while still holding inherently racist beliefs. DiAngelo also explores how police stop Black and Latinx youth more often than white youth for the same activities, and judges give them harsher sentences for the same crime. Judges often claim that white juveniles are often acting because of external factors like being bullied, or coming from a single-parent home, or having a difficult time. Meanwhile, a Black or Latinx youth is “more prone to crime, more animalistic, and has less capacity for remorse.” This difference is based in stereotypical narratives *and* helps perpetuate white supremacy by further disadvantaging people of color.

DiAngelo cites an idea from historian Ibram X. Kendi: “if we truly believe that all humans are equal, then disparity in condition can only be the result of systemic discrimination.” The inequity between white people and people of color in society is proof that systemic inequality still persists. Even though explicitly racist systems like slavery and segregation have formally ended, the political and economic disadvantages white supremacy created for people of color continue today, and that inequality has yet to be fully addressed.



RACISM AND THE GOOD/BAD BINARY

In addition to investigating white fragility and white supremacy, DiAngelo explores one of the foundational misunderstandings that white people have about racism. Historically, white people have conceptualized racism as individual acts that can only be perpetrated by immoral people. However, this conception only makes white people defensive when someone else addresses or points out their racism, believing that others are questioning their moral character. In this way, DiAngelo illustrates that viewing racism as a quality belonging only to very immoral people helps white people avoid confronting their own racism. Instead, society should conceptualize racist behavior as an inevitable by-product of white supremacy that everyone needs to work to disrupt.

The book explores how racism became associated only with extreme acts of violence and prejudice, which is why many people—and particularly white people—continue to think of it

as a trait only belonging to immoral individuals. Prior to the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, it was much more socially acceptable for white people to admit their racial prejudices and belief in white racial superiority. However, because the struggle for civil rights was televised, white people across the nation watched in horror as Black men, women, and children were attacked by police dogs and fire hoses and beaten at lunch counters. Not wanting to be associated with these racist acts of violence, white people became far more reticent to admit to racial prejudice. Even in the present, people often associate racism with extreme and intentional acts. A recent example is the “alt-right” white nationalists marching with torches in Virginia in 2017 to protest the removal of Confederate statues from a park. One white supremacist drove his car into a group of counter-protesters, killing one of them. From the civil rights movement to now, the most visible examples of racism have associated it with violence and immorality.

The good/bad binary (i.e., racists as immoral, violent people and non-racists as good, moral people) helps absolve white people of unintentional or small racist acts and makes them defensive about racism as a whole. By connecting racism to “mean, ignorant, old, uneducated, Southern whites” after the civil rights movement, well-intentioned and open-minded middle-class white people distanced themselves from racism. Most white people, in order to maintain a positive self-image, could not admit to racist behavior, because this would automatically associate them with immorality and violence. This definition of racist—an immoral person who intentionally dislikes others because of their race—makes it difficult to address white people’s racist behavior. DiAngelo writes that white people “then feel the need to defend our character rather than explore the inevitable racial prejudices we have absorbed so that we might change them.” In this way, the good/bad binary definition of racism only perpetuates racism, because it makes white people less likely to acknowledge and remedy it in themselves. The good/bad binary also makes white people complacent about racism as a whole. DiAngelo notes that if she places herself the “not racist” side of the binary, she doesn’t feel the need to take action against racism. She writes that in this scenario, “racism is not my problem; it doesn’t concern me and there is nothing I need to do. This worldview guarantees that I will not build my skills in thinking critically about racism or use my position to challenge racial inequality.” Racial inequality clearly exists, but when white people think about racism on an individual level and view themselves as not racist, they remain complacent about racism and maintain the status quo.

Overcoming the good/bad binary definition of racism can help people acknowledge racist behavior and, consequently, remedy it. DiAngelo seeks to redefine racism, arguing that racism is the “ongoing use of institutional power and authority to support [racial] prejudice and to systematically enforce discriminatory

behaviors with far-reaching effects.” In other words, racism consists not only of individual acts, but how those acts contribute to and perpetuate systematic discrimination over time. If a white person recognizes that racism is “a system into which [they were] socialized,” then they’ll be receptive to feedback about their own racism and see it as an opportunity to learn and grow. When a person’s character isn’t called into question, they are much more open to challenging certain ways that they uphold or perpetuate racism. Challenging the good/bad binary can be liberating for white people, who no longer have to defend themselves against what they perceive as accusations of immorality. DiAngelo writes, “When I start from the premise that of course I have been thoroughly socialized into the racist culture in which I was born, I no longer need to expend energy denying that fact. I am eager—even excited—to identify my inevitable collusion so that I can figure out how to stop colluding!” In this way, throwing out the good/bad binary definition of racism can help ease the tension of feeling defensive and can enable people to remedy their racist behaviors rather than denying them.

White Fragility reinforces the idea that it isn’t useful to think of oneself as belonging on the “good” side of the false binary society has constructed about racism. Rather, it is more important for white people to view themselves on a continuum, actively working to interrupt racism whenever they can.



INDIVIDUALISM, OBJECTIVITY, AND MERITOCRACY

Understanding white people as a collective group is key to combating white supremacy, because it draws attention to the advantages that white people have in society. However, this understanding is difficult for most white people because of three key Western ideologies: individualism, objectivity, and meritocracy. Individualism maintains that every person is unique from others, even those within social groups; objectivity holds that it is possible to be free of all bias; and meritocracy suggests that anyone can succeed if they work hard. In *White Fragility*, DiAngelo argues that these three ideologies construct false narratives and help white people deny their intrinsic advantages as a group.

Individualism helps perpetuate white supremacy because individual white people try to argue that they have not received the same advantages or privileges as most white people. Individualism claims that there are no intrinsic barriers to individual success and that failure is not a consequence of social structures but comes from individual character. However, white people gain an intrinsic advantage from being white, counter to the ideas of individualism. For example, white people “control all major institutions of society and set the policies and practices that others live by”—being white grants them the benefits of automatically belonging to those institutions based on race. Many white people use individualism

to show how they are different from other white people and have not received the same privilege. In one of DiAngelo’s talks about diversity in the workplace, she speaks in front of 200 employees of a company—only five of which are people of color. When she is done speaking, a white man approaches her to say that because he is Italian and Italians were once discriminated against, white people can also experience racism. DiAngelo notes the irony of his question, as so many of his co-workers are white and so clearly have an advantage in being hired at the company. She points out that he should “consider how Italian Americans were able to become white and how that assimilation has shaped his experiences in the present *as a white man*.” DiAngelo does not intend to suggest that white people have never faced any kind of discrimination, but that any discrimination they faced does not exempt them from participating in and benefiting from white supremacy.

Objectivity and trying to avoid the issue of race helps white people believe that they are not biased, obscuring the reality that white people really *do* carry bias and have different experiences from people of color. White supremacy enables white people to see themselves outside of race, as “just human.” For example, Shakespeare and Jane Austen are often seen as representing the “universal human experience,” while Toni Morrison and James Baldwin are seen as representing the Black experience. White narratives become standard narratives and dominate society. Yet this conceals the fact that the white experience is *not* a universal experience and prevents white people from considering themselves as a racial group with a distinct perspective or biases.

Objectivity protects white people’s biases, because denying that they have those biases ensures that they won’t examine or change them. The concept of “colorblindness” is another means of helping white people avoid the topic of race and purport objectivity. Colorblindness holds that acknowledging race is racist; “pretending not to see race” will help end racism because in theory, it will lead people to treat each other equally. But this is a deeply flawed ideology. When a white woman in one of DiAngelo’s diversity training workshops tells DiAngelo’s Black co-leader that she (the white woman) doesn’t see race, the co-leader explains that pretending not to see his race assumed that he had the same experiences she did—but this ignores the fact that people genuinely *do* see race, and that race holds deep social meaning for all people, even if unconsciously. DiAngelo writes, “while the idea of color blindness may have started as a well-intentioned strategy for interrupting racism, in practice it has served to deny the reality of racism and thus hold it in place.” Racial bias is largely unconscious, and so only by investigating racist perceptions (instead of denying them) can white people disrupt those biases.

The belief that the United States is a true meritocracy obscures the systemic inequality that people of color have faced and continue to face. Jackie Robinson is often celebrated as the first

African American to break the color line and play in major league baseball. Yet talking about him in this way suggests that “Robinson finally had what it took to play with whites, as if no black athlete before him was strong enough to compete at that level.” DiAngelo asks readers to imagine if instead, the narrative read: “Jackie Robinson, the first black man whites allowed to play major-league baseball.” Upholding Jackie Robinson as exceptional and that he had success simply because he worked hard enough downplays the idea that he faced barriers as a result of white supremacy, and that without those barriers, other Black people may have had the same success. When white people look for schools and their associated neighborhoods, they often select schools on the basis of test scores. However, contrary to the idea of meritocracy, schools are deeply unequal: schools made up predominantly of students of color often receive less resources and therefore they have lower test scores as a result. This cycle only continues as white families subsequently avoid those schools and further devalue them, writing them off as “bad schools.” Just like individualism and objectivity, the belief in meritocracy obscures the disadvantages people of color face and the advantages that white people receive.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE BIRDCAGE

The birdcage represents interlocking forms of oppression and white people’s ignorance of that oppression. Throughout *White Fragility*, DiAngelo emphasizes that people of color face different forms of economic and social barriers, like segregation, negative stereotypes in the media, and hiring discrimination. These different forms of oppression interlock like the bars of a birdcage, and they serve to reinforce racism and keep people of color on the bottom of the racial hierarchy like a bird in a cage. This is especially true of the Black working class, who remain “on the bottom of every social and economic measure.”

Borrowing the birdcage analogy from scholar Marilyn Frye, DiAngelo demonstrates that if a person is standing too close to the cage, they might not have a full view of the cage and might believe that taken individually, the bars do not actually impede the bird. But stepping back, a person can see that the bird cannot escape the cage. Similarly, she believes that white people do not have a full view of the “cage” of white supremacy and racism, and she argues that they must take a step back and understand the system as a whole in order to see how racism impacts people of color’s lives on a societal level, not just on an individual one.



THE PIER

The pier symbolizes how white people’s defenses against racism are often propped up by false assumptions. Like a pier, it first appears that certain statements can simply stand by themselves, like the phrase “I was taught to treat everyone the same,” which is often used as a defense against receiving feedback on racist behavior. But these statements are propped up by an underlying framework of beliefs, just as a pier is propped up by pillars. For example, the idea that a person was taught to treat everyone the same relies on the false idea that anyone can be objective. DiAngelo shows, however, that no one can be free from bias—and particularly not white people, even though they often believe themselves to be objective. In another example, the defense that someone can’t be racist because they know or work with people of color relies on the underlying belief that racism only consists of conscious intolerance, and that racists can’t stand to be around people of color whatsoever. DiAngelo argues that it is not enough to take these statements at face value—it is necessary to investigate their underlying beliefs, which are often false assumptions.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Beacon Press edition of *White Fragility* published in 2018.

Introduction Quotes

☝ Socialized into a deeply internalized sense of superiority that we either are unaware of or can never admit to ourselves, we become highly fragile in conversations about race. We consider a challenge to our racial worldviews as a challenge to our very identities as good, moral people. Thus, we perceive any attempt to connect us to the system of racism as an unsettling and unfair moral offense. The smallest amount of racial stress is intolerable—the mere suggestion that being white has meaning often triggers a range of defensive responses. These include emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and withdrawal from the stress-inducing situation. These responses work to reinstate white equilibrium as they repel the challenge, return our racial comfort, and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy. I conceptualize this process as *white fragility*.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

White Fragility's introduction lays out several of its major themes and the primary topic of the book: white fragility. First, DiAngelo introduces the idea of white supremacy: "a deeply internalized sense of superiority." Because white people so rarely think of themselves in racial terms and often overlook the idea that being white does give them a particular perspective, they are unable to recognize the advantages and privileges of being white. DiAngelo also introduces the argument that white people generally connect racism to intentional and immoral acts of discrimination, which is why people have such a vehement reaction to being associated with racism at all. Yet the guilty, angry, and other defensive reactions that white people have—what DiAngelo defines as white fragility—only support the racial status quo. Therefore, in order to combat racism and white supremacy, white people must address white fragility.

DiAngelo notably uses a few writing strategies to mitigate any white fragility that white readers might experience in reading her book. From the outset, DiAngelo establishes herself as a white woman—in fact, this is the first sentence of her book—with the hopes that this will make white readers more receptive to her message. And in framing her book in the language of "we," DiAngelo ensures that the book reads less like an accusation and implies that even someone who is as racially aware as DiAngelo has had these reactions and also needs to work on white fragility. She also does not name white supremacy or racism at the outset, knowing that these are loaded and misunderstood terms. In approaching these topics carefully, DiAngelo aims not to trigger white fragility in the hopes that if white people are open to her ideas, they can then ultimately learn to combat their own white fragility.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝ In fact, when we try to talk openly and honestly about race, white fragility quickly emerges as we are so often met with silence, defensiveness, argumentation, certitude, and other forms of pushback. These are not natural responses; they are social forces that prevent us from attaining the racial knowledge we need to engage more productively, and they function powerfully to hold the racial hierarchy in place. These forces include the ideologies of individualism and meritocracy, narrow and repetitive media representations of people of color, segregation in schools and neighborhoods, depictions of whiteness as the human ideal, truncated history, jokes and warnings, taboos on openly talking about race, and white solidarity.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 8



Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, DiAngelo explores the different facets of society that both reinforce and contribute to white fragility (white people's defensiveness during discussions of race). In particular, the ideologies of individualism and meritocracy both prevent white people from assessing their privileges as a group. Individualism suggests that people are all different, even within social groups, while meritocracy is the idea that anyone can succeed so long as they work hard. These ideologies maintain white supremacy because white people aren't willing to examine systemic racism in society and how they benefit from it. Similarly, segregation in schools and neighborhoods and depictions of whiteness as the ideal or default in society are outgrowths of this systemic racism, but people rarely discuss these issues in racial terms or, when they are discussed, people react with white fragility.

The taboos surrounding talking openly about race only makes discussing these issues even harder, and one of DiAngelo's primary aims with her book is to show that it is necessary to talk about these issues in order to remedy them. The only way that this can happen, the book suggests, lies in overcoming white fragility. This is because white fragility takes the focus off of racism and white supremacy. In this way, white fragility is a clear (if unintentional) tool to "hold the racial hierarchy in place."

☝ The first in line was a white man who explained that he was Italian American and that Italians were once considered black and discriminated against, so didn't I think that white people experience racism too? That he could be in that overwhelmingly white room of coworkers and exempt himself from an examination of his whiteness because Italians were once discriminated against is an all-too-common example of individualism. A more fruitful form of engagement (because it expands rather than protects his current worldview) would have been to consider how Italian Americans were able to become white and how that assimilation has shaped his experiences in the present *as a white man*. His claims did not illustrate that he was different from other white people when it comes to race. I can predict that many readers will make similar claims of exception precisely because we are products of our culture, not separate from it.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

After DiAngelo gives a talk to 200 employees about white fragility, a man from the audience approaches her explaining that he is different from other white people because he is Italian and they experienced discrimination at one point. Yet here DiAngelo points out how this line of thinking—the belief that every person is unique from others, even within social groups—helps perpetuate white supremacy. This man’s argument is a classic example of individualism, as she points out. She acknowledges that white people *have* faced discrimination, as Italians faced discrimination and xenophobia in the past. And yet, because they were able to assimilate into whiteness, he and other Italian Americans have a very different experience in the world than Black Americans because Italian Americans do not face racism in the present.



Moreover, DiAngelo illustrates how this man’s justification is a form of white fragility. This man’s defensiveness and insistence that he is not like other white people deflects from any examination of how he might perpetuate or benefit from white supremacy. DiAngelo notes that of the 200 employees in the room, there are only a few people of color. And so reacting in this defensive way only ensures that this problem will be perpetuated. Instead of jumping to defensiveness, the man should be honestly working to change the dynamic in the company that has clearly led to inequality in hiring.

Furthermore, the man’s justification actually proves DiAngelo’s point that society can and should treat white people as a collective group (rather than unique individuals, as individualism would hold), because he tries to claim that he is an exception, just like many other white people do. Trying to separate themselves from white supremacy is a shared characteristic among white people, and their actions only deflect from the reality that they benefit from white supremacy.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ Because race is a product of social forces, it has also manifested itself along class lines; poor and working-class people were not always perceived as fully white. In a society that grants fewer opportunities to those not seen as white, economic and racial forces are inseparable. However, poor and working-class whites were eventually granted full entry into whiteness as a way to exploit labor. If poor whites were focused on feeling superior to those below them in status, they were less focused on those above. The poor and working classes, if united across race, could be a powerful force. But racial divisions have served to keep them from organizing against the owning class who profits from their labor. Still, although working-class whites experience classism, they aren’t also experiencing racism. I grew up in poverty and felt a deep sense of shame about being poor. But I also always knew that I was white, and that it was better to be white.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

As DiAngelo explores the history of race in the United States, she observes that poor, working-class people were not always considered white. Returning to the idea of individualism, DiAngelo acknowledges that some white people certainly *do* face greater discrimination or inequality based on their wealth and status—DiAngelo relates to this idea on a personal level, as she notes that she was poor growing up and experienced classism firsthand. However, her personal story only proves her point that individualism often obscures white supremacy. Because even though she faced classism, she also knows that she was inherently better off than her nonwhite counterparts in the same class. Being able to openly admit and examine the privileges afforded to white people simply because of their race—like being comfortable in most spaces, or not facing race-based discrimination in hiring and therefore having greater social mobility—is a key step towards being able to change those systems.



DiAngelo also emphasizes here that racism is and has always been a tool of the wealthy white elite. Being able to control the narrative of who gets to be considered white is a key part of white supremacy to sow greater divisions among the working classes. Later, DiAngelo explains that 29 of the wealthiest 50 people in the world are American, and all 29 of those Americans are white. Taken together, these points


illustrate that white supremacy continues to this day, as evidenced by the deep socioeconomic inequality between the races.

☝ If you stand close to a birdcage and press your face against the wires, your perception of the bars will disappear and you will have an almost unobstructed view of the bird. If you turn your head to examine one wire of the cage closely, you will not be able to see the other wires. If your understanding of the cage is based on this myopic view, you may not understand why the bird doesn't just go around the single wire and fly away. You might even assume that the bird liked or chose its place in the cage.

But if you stepped back and took a wider view, you would begin to see that the wires come together in an interlocking pattern—a pattern that works to hold the bird firmly in place.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, DiAngelo discusses both how racism is a system of interlocking barriers, and the idea that white people are ignorant of this system. The birdcage, an idea borrowed from scholar Marilyn Frye, is a visual metaphor for those interlocking forms of oppression, as people of color face systemic economic and social barriers like segregation, negative stereotypes in the media, and hiring discrimination. These different forms of oppression interlock like the bars of a birdcage, and in the metaphor, they reinforce racism and keep people of color on the bottom of the racial hierarchy (i.e., trapped in the cage).



DiAngelo demonstrates that if a person is standing too close to the cage, they wouldn't have a full view of the cage and thus might believe that taken individually, the bars do not actually impede the bird. But stepping back, a person can see that the bird cannot escape the cage, and there are lots more interlocking bars than they initially thought. Likewise, white people do not currently have a full view of the “cage” of white supremacy and racism, arguing that they must take a step back and understand the system as a whole in order to see how racism impacts people of color's lives on a societal level, not just on an individual one. The fact that a

person might assume that the bird “liked or chose its place in the cage” only reinforces how white people, free from this systemic oppression, also have the ability to shape the narratives about the bird without fully understanding the whole picture. In this way, while white people believe they might be objective, in reality their biased view can perpetuate harmful narratives that then reinforce systemic oppression.

☝ The story of Jackie Robinson is a classic example of how whiteness obscures racism by rendering whites, white privilege, and racist institutions invisible. Robinson is often celebrated as the first African American to break the color line and play in major-league baseball. While Robinson was certainly an amazing baseball player, this story line depicts him as racially special, a black man who broke the color line himself. The subtext is that Robinson finally had what it took to play with whites, as if no black athlete before him was strong enough to compete at that level. Imagine if instead, the story went something like this: “Jackie Robinson, the first black man whites allowed to play major-league baseball.” This version makes a critical distinction because no matter how fantastic a player Robinson was, he simply could not play in the major leagues if whites—who controlled the institution—did not allow it. Were he to walk onto the field before being granted permission by white owners and policy makers, the police would have removed him.

Narratives of racial exceptionalism obscure the reality of ongoing institutional white control while reinforcing the ideologies of individualism and meritocracy.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, DiAngelo illustrates how society's current narratives obscure white supremacy and institutional racism. The United States' emphasis on meritocracy—the belief that anyone can succeed if they work hard enough or have enough talent—has a large impact on how the country tells its history, particularly when it comes to issues of race. Talking about Jackie Robinson as the first African American man to break the color line is an important step to celebrate. But it also masks the many other talented African American baseball players of color who might have also played in the Major Leagues were it not for white control of the

institution. It implies that Jackie Robinson was individually gifted in a way no Black baseball player had been before, and that had success as a result of working hard and/or having such extraordinary talent.

This passage is part of the book's ongoing argument that one of the most powerful aspects of white supremacy is that it largely remains unnamed in society. And, when it is named, white people often react with white fragility (e.g., defensiveness, anger, tears) and take the focus off of systemic racism. By calling attention to this dynamic, DiAngelo hopes to remedy white supremacy's invisibility so that people can then actively work to change it.

●● Consider one statistic from the preceding list: of the hundred top-grossing films worldwide in 2016, ninety-five were directed by white Americans (ninety-nine of them by men). That is an incredibly homogenous group of directors. Because these men are most likely at the top of the social hierarchy in terms of race, class, and gender, they are the least likely to have a wide variety of authentic egalitarian cross-racial relationships. Yet they are in the position to represent the racial "other." Their representations of the "other" are thereby extremely narrow and problematic, and yet they are reinforced over and over.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

DiAngelo cites statistics for 2016–2017, pointing out how white people dominate fields such as politics, teaching, and the media—all of which have powerful effects throughout society. She expands upon her point using film directors specifically, showing how white supremacy can greatly shape society without people realizing it. White American men make up the overwhelming majority of filmmakers making the most successful films, and in doing so they control narratives that are consumed not just in the United States, but also globally.

In addition, these statistics illustrate that those who are given the power to produce big budget films are overwhelmingly white, highlighting an often-unnamed white privilege in the field. And because they already grew up in a relatively privileged demographic, these white directors have little exposure to other groups of people. Thus, the films present a view from people who inherently


hold stereotypes and biases and likely have little authentic experience to counteract those stereotypes and biases. The films then contribute to the narratives that the next generation of filmmakers consume, and so on.

The point of the statistics is to call out white supremacy, because it largely goes unnoticed in the United States and most people rarely consider how it shapes the stories that people consume. Calling attention to it is therefore the first step to being able to change the system or at least be more aware of the narrow set of narratives that people consume.

Chapter 3 Quotes

●● He then explained to her that he was black, he was confident that she could see this, and that his race meant that he had a very different experience in life than she did. If she were ever going to understand or challenge racism, she would need to acknowledge this difference. Pretending that she did not notice that he was black was not helpful to him in any way, as it denied his reality—indeed, it refused his reality—and kept hers insular and unchallenged. This pretense that she did not notice his race assumed that he was “just like her,” and in so doing, she projected her reality onto him. For example, I feel welcome at work so you must too; I have never felt that my race mattered, so you must feel that yours doesn't either. But of course, we do see the race of other people, and race holds deep social meaning for us.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, DiAngelo recalls how in a workshop, one white woman's assessment that she didn't see race, and therefore she couldn't be racist, was unhelpful to the people of color around her. This color-blind ideology, which DiAngelo explores in this chapter, is an extension of objectivity, wherein white people often purport to be totally free from bias or a racial viewpoint. This ideology stemmed from Martin Luther King Jr.'s “I Have a Dream” speech, in which he voiced his longing to be judged by his personal character, not his skin color. As a result, many white people thought that pretending not to see race would then alleviate racism.

Yet as the African American man who co-facilitated this workshop with DiAngelo illustrates, racism did not end because people suddenly pretended not to see race. As

DiAngelo notes here, people genuinely *do* see others' race, and white people hold stereotypes and biases that are reinforced by many different kinds of messages. This includes narratives on TV or in movies, warnings from other people, or the mere fact that most white people live completely segregated from people of color. And so a white person denying the fact that race has deep social meaning only makes it more difficult to name racial dynamics and racism in that person's life. In this way, DiAngelo demonstrates that objectivity and color-blindness are actually harmful ideologies because they prevent people like the white woman in this example from honestly examining the racist perceptions that they might have.



or "sketchy," in reality this communicates the racial makeup of any situation or neighborhood. (When a white person refers to a "sketchy" neighborhood, they're often implying that it's a nonwhite neighborhood, while a "safe" or "sheltered" neighborhood implies it's a predominantly white area.) This language allows white people to maintain a positive self-image because they don't have to admit to racial prejudice while still holding inherently racist beliefs. White people both set the narratives around people of color and then use those negative stereotypes to justify separating themselves from people of color, all without ever naming race as a reason. In this way, one of the most pernicious aspects of white supremacy is that it can largely go unnamed in society.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ It is rare for me to experience a sense of not belonging racially, and these are usually very temporary, easily avoidable situations. Indeed, throughout my life, I have been warned that I should avoid situations in which I might be a racial minority. These situations are often presented as scary, dangerous, or "sketchy." Yet if the environment or situation is viewed as good, nice, or valuable, I can be confident that as a white person, I will be seen as racially belonging there.

☞ To use an example from school, consider the writers we are all expected to read; the list usually includes Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Mark Twain, Jane Austen, and William Shakespeare. These writers are seen as representing the universal human experience, and we read them precisely because they are presumed to be able to speak to us all. Now consider the writers we turn to during events promoting diversity—events such as Multicultural Authors Week and Black History Month. These writers usually include Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Amy Tan, and Sandra Cisneros. We go to these writers for the black or Asian perspective; Toni Morrison is always seen as a black writer, not just a writer. But when we are not looking for the black or Asian perspective, we return to white writers, reinforcing the idea of whites as just human, and people of color as particular kinds (racialized) of humans.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

Chapter 4 explores how race shapes white people's lives even though white people often view themselves as being outside of race. In this passage, DiAngelo illustrates how white people benefit from white supremacy as a group. This is difficult for white people to admit, because it counteracts individualism—the belief that all people are unique, even within social groups. But DiAngelo notes that one of the primary privileges of whiteness is a feeling of belonging in most situations, particularly if the environment is viewed positively. This is a tangible psychological benefit that provides ease to white people in most workplaces or prestigious universities, for example.

White people also set the narratives about situations or places where being white is not the norm. This challenges the notion of objectivity—the belief that people can be free from all bias—by showing how white people talk about race using coded language. While white people can maintain plausible deniability when using language like "dangerous"

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

This passage illustrates of how white supremacy allows white people to see themselves outside of race. White people are able to set themselves as the norm or default in society and believe that they hold no collective bias or perspective. This reinforces the idea of objectivity, which is the (false) belief that anyone can be completely objective. Objectivity manifests in ideas like believing that Jane Austen, William Shakespeare, and other white writers represent the "universal human experience," while James



Baldwin and Sandra Cisneros write from a specific and racialized perspective (the “Black experience”).

DiAngelo counters objectivity by pointing out that the white writers also represent a very specific perspective, but viewing them in this generic way conceals the fact that the white experience is not a universal experience. As a result, white people rarely consider themselves to be a racial group with particular biases; consequently they are able to deny those biases more readily and rarely examine or seek to change those biases. In this way, objectivity is a tool to both obscure and maintain white supremacy.

●● The very real consequences of breaking white solidarity play a fundamental role in maintaining white supremacy. We do indeed risk censure and other penalties from our fellow whites. We might be accused of being politically correct or might be perceived as angry, humorless, combative, and not suited to go far in an organization. In my own life, these penalties have worked as a form of social coercion. Seeking to avoid conflict and wanting to be liked, I have chosen silence all too often.

Conversely, when I kept quiet about racism, I was rewarded with social capital such as being seen as fun, cooperative, and a team player.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, DiAngelo explores white solidarity—the idea that white people often do not hold each other accountable for racist behavior. White solidarity both upholds white supremacy and is an example of white fragility. The fact that white people are often hesitant to talk about race makes it difficult to interrupt racist behavior, which only perpetuates white supremacy. White people even reward each other for not calling each other out on racism, as DiAngelo notes that a white person who remains silent on or goes along with something like a racist joke is seen as “fun, cooperative, and a team player.”

Not wanting to call a fellow white person out on a racist joke reveals white fragility in two ways: first, because white people don’t want to be seen as “humorless” or “combative,” as DiAngelo notes here. It is more comfortable for them to avoid the topic of race entirely. But they also know that the

person who told the joke is likely to react with white fragility, painting themselves as victims and pulling the focus off of the joke in the first place. As such, many white people believe that the easiest thing to do is not to challenge this behavior—usually, as DiAngelo writes, able to justify their actions by arguing that they were not the perpetrator of the joke. But choosing silence over discomfort only upholds white supremacy because it allows this behavior to continue unimpeded, and the only way to challenge racism is to be actively anti-racist.

●● For example, the criminal behavior of white juveniles is often seen as caused by external factors—the youth comes from a single-parent home, is having a hard time right now, just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time, or was bullied at school. Attributing the cause of the action to external factors lessens the person’s responsibility and classifies that person as a victim. But black and Latinx youth are not afforded this same compassion.

When black and Latinx youth go before a judge, the cause of the crime is more often attributed to something internal to the person—the youth is naturally more prone to crime, is more animalistic, and has less capacity for remorse (similarly, a 2016 study found that half of a sample of medical students and residents believe that blacks feel less pain). Whites continually receive the benefit of the doubt not granted to people of color—our race alone helps establish our innocence.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis



While describing how police and judges treat young people of color (especially Black and Latinx people) versus their white peers, DiAngelo demonstrates another aspect of white supremacy that often goes unnamed. Though race isn’t explicitly named in these situations, using differently coded language is an extension of white supremacy—like the presumed innocence of the white person in this example and the belief that they committed crimes based on external factors. By contrast, judges use language like “animalistic” or “naturally prone to crime,” language that plays into racial stereotypes about people of color.

This example shows how white supremacy both controls narratives and helps perpetuate those narratives. Because

people of color are stereotyped as being less innocent, they are not given the same benefit of the doubt that white people receive. As such, people of color are then given more and harsher sentences. This only reinforces the stereotypes that people of color are “naturally prone to crime” and further disadvantages people of color because of the harsher punishments they receive. DiAngelo also hints at the fact that this problem exists not only within the criminal justice system, but also within the medical system and presumably within society generally as well—the bias is pervasive but difficult to counteract because it is so often based in this coded language.

“In a postracial era, we don’t have to say it’s about race or the color of the kids in the building...We can concentrate poverty and kids of color and then fail to provide the resources to support and sustain those schools, and then we can see a school full of black kids and say, ‘Oh, look at their test scores.’ It’s all very tidy now, this whole system.” Readers have no doubt heard schools and neighborhoods discussed in these terms and know that this talk is racially coded; “urban” and “low test scores” are code for “not white” and therefore less desirable.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, a quote from Columbia sociologist Amy Stuart Wells, illustrates the problem with relying on ideologies like meritocracy in a society so deeply affected by racism and white supremacy. Because schools with more students of color have been systemically disadvantaged, they have lower test scores. White suburban parents can then avoid those schools, creating narratives that their test scores are low because the schools are not as good or the students are not encouraged to work as hard. Because they can use justifications like test scores, they never have to actually admit to racial prejudice while still completely segregating themselves from schools with predominantly students of color and their corresponding neighborhoods.

Avoiding those schools then allows the cycle to repeat itself, as schools with white students receive more resources and therefore have greater success. But rather than fix education systems so that everyone has equal opportunity for a good education, white people segregate themselves for their own advantage. Because schools with white students have a great advantage over other schools,

DiAngelo illustrates how meritocracy—the idea that anyone can succeed if they work hard—is patently false, but relying on this narrative obscures white supremacy and the advantages that white people inherently have.

Chapter 5 Quotes

While making racism bad seems like a positive change, we have to look at how this functions in practice. Within this paradigm, to suggest that I am racist is to deliver a deep moral blow—a kind of character assassination. Having received this blow, I must defend my character, and that is where all my energy will go—to deflecting the charge, rather than reflecting on my behavior. In this way, the good/bad binary makes it nearly impossible to talk to white people about racism, what it is, how it shapes all of us, and the inevitable ways that we are conditioned to participate in it. If we cannot discuss these dynamics or see ourselves within them, we cannot stop participating in racism. The good/bad binary made it effectively impossible for the average white person to understand—much less interrupt—racism.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

This chapter examines how people’s understanding of racism has changed over time: following the civil rights movement, white people primarily associated racism with intentional (and usually violent) acts done by immoral people. Yet this passage illustrates how this created an understanding of racism that is dependent on a binary: racist people are all bad, so good people cannot be racist. As such, addressing any racist behavior immediately becomes a “character assassination,” triggering white fragility. The person becomes more invested in countering the accusation than in openly and honestly examining their own behavior. As such, when racism and white fragility work in tandem, people deflect from racism and therefore maintain the status quo.


In this way, DiAngelo suggests that white people must first upend the good/bad binary so that they do not feel like accusations of racism are character assassinations. With this definition, white people can work to avoid their white fragility and then examine and change their own racist behaviors. Without a different mentality and assumptions, it will continue to be “nearly impossible” to talk to white

people about racism, and thus this is a crucial first step to tackling racism as a society.

☝ Most of us alive before and during the 1960s have had images from the civil rights conflicts of that time held up as the epitome of racism. Today we have images of white nationalists marching in Charlottesville, Virginia, to hold up. And while speaking up against these explicitly racist actions is critical, we must also be careful not to use them to keep ourselves on the “good” side of a false binary. I have found it much more useful to think of myself as on a continuum. Racism is so deeply woven into the fabric of our society that I do not see myself escaping from that continuum in my lifetime. But I can continually seek to move further along it. I am not in a fixed position on the continuum; my position is dictated by what I am actually doing at a given time.

Conceptualizing myself on an active continuum changes the question from whether I am or am not racist to a much more constructive question: Am I actively seeking to interrupt racism in this context?

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, DiAngelo suggests an alternative to the good/bad binary definition of racism. Rather than associating it only with extreme, intentional, and violent acts like a white nationalist driving a car into a group of counter-protestors (as in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017), it is important to be aware of the fact that racism can also manifest in smaller, unintentional acts, as well as broader, systemic discrimination. And it’s just as important to both admit and counter the many different forms of racism that exist.


It is crucial here—as it is throughout the book—that DiAngelo uses self-reflexive words like “I” and “we” in explaining how she thinks about racism and challenging racist behavior. It acknowledges that, as a white woman, she is also prone to the occasional slip-up just like the reader. And like the reader, she must also work to understand racism in a new way, accept feedback, and interrupt white supremacy. Viewing herself on a continuum suggests that this is an ongoing process, and she can always work to get better and better at interrupting racism in others and challenging her own racist beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors. In taking the task upon herself, she encourages

others to do the same and models how to do so.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ Still, this program has been systematically chipped away at, and several states have eliminated affirmative action programs altogether. In turn, African Americans continue to be the most underrepresented group at the organizational leadership level. In 2018, affirmative action has all but been dismantled. Yet invariably, I will encounter a white male—bristling with umbrage—who raises the issue of affirmative action. It seems that we white people just cannot let go of our outrage over how unfair this toothless attempt to rectify centuries of injustice has been to us. And this umbrage consistently surfaces in overwhelmingly white leadership groups that have asked me to come in and help them recruit and retain more people of color.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Chapter 6 discusses affirmative action, which was meant to remedy discrimination in hiring. However, DiAngelo illustrates how the program is largely “toothless,” as affirmative action only applies to state government agencies (not private companies), has very little accountability, and doesn’t guarantee that more people of color will be hired. And yet, white people still frequently point to affirmative action as a reason that *they* are experiencing discrimination.



This is both an example of white fragility and an example of how white supremacy shapes narratives that benefit itself. White people know how historically, people of color have experienced “centuries of injustice” in hiring. But calling attention to this fact at all or trying to remedy it triggers white people to believe that *they* are now being discriminated against. Ironically, as DiAngelo notes, she often hears this outrage at companies that are looking to correct their lack of diversity—illustrating how many places still haven’t rectified discrimination against people of color in hiring despite affirmative action. The fact that people of color (and particularly Black people) continue to be underrepresented at the organizational leadership level only emphasizes how this is a broad problem with empiric evidence. On the other hand, white people use affirmative action as a general way to air grievances even though they already have jobs at the company—which is why they are taking DiAngelo’s workshop in the first place.

There are also many myths about affirmative action, like the idea that there are quotas for people of color or that companies have to hire unqualified people of color. All of these are untrue. Thus, pointing to affirmative action is another aspect of white fragility because it takes the focus off of the real injustice that people of color have faced in hiring and positions white people as the victims.

Chapter 7 Quotes

●● These white teachers' responses illustrate several dynamics of white fragility. First, the teachers never considered that in not understanding the student's reaction, they might be lacking some knowledge or context. They demonstrated no curiosity about the student's perspective or why she might have taken offense. Nor did they show concern about the student's feelings. They were unable to separate intentions from impact. [...] His colleague, aware that Mr. Roberts was in serious trouble about a cross-racial incident, still maintained white solidarity with him by validating their shared perspective and invalidating that of the student of color. The teachers used the student witness who excused the comment as proof that the other student was wrong. According to them, the witness was the correct student because she denied any racial implications. Finally, the teachers used this interaction as an opportunity to increase racial divides rather than bridge them and to protect their worldviews and positions.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker), Mr. Roberts

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

When Mr. Roberts describes an incident experienced by a fellow teacher in his school, he laments how they can't "say anything anymore" because a Black student objected to the other teacher calling her "girl." Here, DiAngelo picks apart why this perspective is rooted in white fragility, and why it is important to overcome these kinds of unhelpful, emotionally charged reactions. While Mr. Roberts, the other teacher, and even another Black student in the class didn't find the teacher's statement offensive, they had little desire to understand the offended student or consider her feelings. Mr. Roberts and the other teacher were more interested in denying the fact that the teacher's statement was racially problematic than actively exploring how it could have been taken that way and working to overcome it. In addition, they pitted the two Black students against each

other in justifying the teacher's comment and used one of them to prop up their white fragility.

In the end, DiAngelo emphasizes that it is more important to be uncomfortable and learn about one's mistakes than to maintain the appearance of not being racist, because, as DiAngelo has proven, *all* white people buy into white supremacy and hold racist stereotypes. Mr. Roberts, who is already in trouble for another incident, would thus do better to actively try and learn from these incidents—not only for his own well-being and staying out of legal trouble, but for the benefit of the students of color around him. Instead, he reacts with white fragility as he becomes more closed off from this learning and tries to position himself as someone who is not racist.

Chapter 8 Quotes

●● White fragility functions as a form of bullying; I am going to make it so miserable for you to confront me—no matter how diplomatically you try to do so—that you will simply back off, give up, and never raise the issue again. White fragility keeps people of color in line and "in their place." In this way, it is a powerful form of white racial control.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

Here, DiAngelo provides several examples of how white fragility has completely derailed some of her workshops. This passage then links white fragility to white supremacy, illustrating how the two are deeply connected. DiAngelo uses words like "bullying" to show that these reactions are far from harmless. Whereas many white people who are given feedback on racist behavior often posit themselves as victims—one of the manifestations of white fragility in the first place—viewing white fragility as "bullying" emphasizes how the person giving feedback is still the victim, or at least that the person receiving feedback has, in fact, made a mistake.



Not only does white fragility cause harm on an individual level, as the people of color or white people providing the feedback are often attacked in response, but it also causes harm on a larger, societal level. It restores control to white people, reinforcing and perpetuating white supremacy in the society. It also prevents people from disrupting their

own racist behavior, allowing it to continue in the future. In this way, DiAngelo shows that white fragility isn't simply a knee-jerk reaction of defensiveness on an individual level, but it is also a defense system of white supremacy that in and of itself has to be disrupted.

perhaps even more importantly, not reacting with white fragility could then allow white people to examine and change deeper forms of systemic bias, outside of individual acts. But none of that is possible without first overcoming white fragility.

☝ In my workshops, I often ask people of color, “How often have you given white people feedback on our unaware yet inevitable racism? How often has that gone well for you?” Eye-rolling, head-shaking, and outright laughter follow, along with the consensus of *rarely, if ever*. I then ask, “What would it be like if you could simply give us feedback, have us graciously receive it, reflect, and work to change the behavior?” Recently a man of color sighed and said, “It would be revolutionary.” I ask my fellow whites to consider the profundity of that response. It would be *revolutionary* if we could receive, reflect, and work to change the behavior. On the one hand, the man's response points to how difficult and fragile we are. But on the other hand, it indicates how simple it can be to take responsibility for our racism. However, we aren't likely to get there if we are operating from the dominant worldview that only intentionally mean people can participate in racism.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis



The end of this chapter posits alternatives to reacting to feedback about racism with white fragility. Again, DiAngelo notes that this fragility largely springs from the good/bad binary definition of racism, because white people believe that only “intentionally mean people” can participate in it. However, overcoming that idea allows people to explore more openly their racist beliefs, receive feedback on them, and work to change them.

DiAngelo quotes this man of color in her workshop to illustrate how important—and how potentially easy—it would be for white people to take greater responsibility for racist behavior, and how much white people could change on an individual level. Rather than reacting with white fragility and defensiveness, white people could reflect on their mistakes and work to change them. This would accomplish two other crucial things as well. First, it would make people of color more willing to provide white people with feedback, therefore allowing them to acknowledge and change their racist behavior even more—in contrast to the fact that giving feedback works “rarely, if ever” now. And

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝ Notice that I did not tell Eva that she was racist or that her story was racist. But what I did do was challenge her self-image as someone exempt from racism. Paradoxically, Eva's anger that I did not take her claims at face value surfaced within the context of a volunteer workshop on racism, which she ostensibly attended to deepen her understanding of racism.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker), Eva

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

In one of DiAngelo's workshops, a white German woman named Eva becomes insulted that DiAngelo said that she wasn't exempt from racism just because she grew up in Germany. First, DiAngelo notes that white supremacy doesn't just underpin the United States—white supremacy exists globally, particularly because American media and stories are circulated so widely. Moreover, as DiAngelo notes, being segregated from people of color (as many white Americans do not have significant relationships with people of color) does not preclude a person from having racial bias or participating in racism.

Additionally, DiAngelo emphasizes how extreme white fragility can be. She calls attention to the fact that Eva's white fragility didn't even emerge in response to feedback on racist behavior. Instead, she reacted to the idea that she *could* be racist, or that growing up in Germany did not *exempt* her from racism (particularly because DiAngelo notes that Eva has lived in the United States for 23 years now). Even people who are trying to deepen their understanding of racism (this particular workshop was voluntary) feel extreme white fragility in the face of any suggestion that they might be complicit in racism or that they might not understand racism entirely. This is why white fragility is so important to overcome, so that people can actually deepen their understanding of racism.

Chapter 10 Quotes

●● Racism is the norm rather than an aberration. Feedback is key to our ability to recognize and repair our inevitable and often unaware collusion. In recognition of this, I try to follow these guidelines:

1. How, where, and when you give me feedback is irrelevant—it is the feedback I want and need. Understanding that it is hard to give, I will take it any way I can get it. From my position of social, cultural, and institutional white power and privilege, I am perfectly safe and I can handle it. If I cannot handle it, it's on me to build my racial stamina.
2. Thank you.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis


DiAngelo notes that white people often focus on how feedback on racially problematic behavior is delivered. But in this passage, DiAngelo emphasizes that this is a manifestation of white fragility because it focuses more on the messenger or delivery than on the message, thus deflecting from the person's own racist behavior and instead positioning themselves as the victim.

Here, DiAngelo provides guidelines for how white people can best accept feedback, illustrating that it is more important to focus on stopping racist patterns than focusing on how the feedback makes white people feel. This is a form of deflection as it diverts focus from the real issue. Thanking the person giving feedback is important because it acknowledges that the feedback is valuable—not only for the person who is receiving the feedback (who can then disrupt their racist behavior), but also for the person who is giving it. The more graciously white people can receive feedback without their white fragility being triggered, the more likely people will be to call out racism and give feedback when necessary. And the more individuals can honestly examine their racist patterns, the more likely they'll go deeper to examine racism on a societal level.

Chapter 11 Quotes

●● Whether intended or not, when a white woman cries over some aspect of racism, all the attention immediately goes to her, demanding time, energy, and attention from everyone in the room when they should be focused on ameliorating racism. While she is given attention, the people of color are yet again abandoned and/or blamed. [...] Antiracism strategist and facilitator Reagen Price paraphrases an analogy based on the work of critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. Price says, "Imagine first responders at the scene of an accident rushing to comfort the person whose car struck a pedestrian, while the pedestrian lies bleeding on the street." In a common but particularly subversive move, racism becomes about white distress, white suffering, and white victimization.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

This chapter centers on "white woman's tears," which the book suggests is another manifestation of white fragility. White women crying over some aspect of racism is another way that white women deflect from that racism, focusing people's "time, energy, and attention" on comforting them rather than addressing racism. And in many cases, the people of color, who are the true victims of racism, are not given that same attention or are made to feel bad in pointing out the woman's racism.

The car accident analogy that DiAngelo cites is particularly evocative. It impresses upon the reader how dire the situation can be—where experiencing the brunt of racism over and over is like experiencing an emotional or psychological car accident. But white women's tears flip the dynamic of comfort, where they position themselves as the victims and get all the attention while people of color do not receive that same treatment, despite the fact that they were the ones who were hurt in the first place. In this way, DiAngelo emphasizes the need to avoid (or at least draw less attention to) white women's tears in the face of racism, so that the focus can be on dismantling racism instead.


Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ First, once I was aware that I had behaved problematically, I took the time to process my reaction with another white person. It was not Angela's duty to take care of my feelings or feel pressure to reassure me. I was also careful to choose someone who I knew would hold me accountable, not someone who would insist that Angela was too sensitive. After I vented my feelings (embarrassment, guilt, shame, and regret), we did our best to identify how I had reinforced racism. I was then ready to return to Angela. [...]

'When Angela and I met, I owned my racism. I did not focus on my intentions but focused on the impact of my behavior and apologized for that impact. [...]

We then did move forward. Today, we have more trust—not less—in our relationship than we did before this incident.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker), Angela

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 145-146

Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, DiAngelo describes the steps she took when she unintentionally made a racist comment in front of her company's new web developer, a Black woman named Angela. In this passage, DiAngelo models the best way to avoid white fragility. She admits that it is never comfortable to own up to one's racist behavior, but sitting with that discomfort rather than being defensive is key to repairing the relationship. The other steps she takes also hinge on leaning into her discomfort rather than jumping to defend herself: she doesn't try to justify or explain her comment, try to position Angela as "too sensitive" or burden Angela or another person of color with having to comfort her over her shame and embarrassment at the comment.

The outcome between DiAngelo and Angela only proves how important these steps are. Because DiAngelo was open to learning rather than defensive and closed off, she was able to mend the broken trust between her and Angela and build an even stronger relationship. This illustrates the importance of avoiding white fragility. While denying racist

behavior doesn't prove that a person isn't racist, being open to receiving feedback on unintentional racism actually helps a person improve and makes people of color more willing to build authentic relationships with white people.

☝☝ Unlike heavy feelings such as guilt, the continuous work of identifying my internalized superiority and how it may be manifesting itself is incredibly liberating. When I start from the premise that of course I have been thoroughly socialized into the racist culture in which I was born, I no longer need to expend energy denying that fact. I am eager—even excited—to identify my inevitable collusion so that I can figure out how to stop colluding! Denial and the defensiveness that is needed to maintain it is exhausting.

Related Characters: Robin DiAngelo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

This passage illustrates that overcoming white fragility does not have to be a solely uncomfortable experience. DiAngelo acknowledges that admitting to racism provokes discomfort in white people because of the good/bad binary that she explored, wherein admitting to racism both makes white people guilty and feel like bad people. But here, DiAngelo emphasizes that racism is inevitable—the most a person can do is recognize or admit to it when they exhibit it and actively work to change that behavior in the future. In another passage, she acknowledges that racism is so ingrained in the culture that she will likely not escape racist patterns in her lifetime. In this way, she posits white fragility as a kind of anchor, weighing white people down because of the energy it takes to be defensive and hurt by an accusation, rather than the freedom of apologizing and moving forward. In this way, DiAngelo posits that anti-racist work can be liberating not just for people of color but for white people as well, providing another, perhaps more personally beneficial reason for why white people should avoid white fragility.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INTRODUCTION

Robin DiAngelo, who is a white woman, and her colleague, who is a Black woman, are leading a workplace diversity training workshop. During the workshop, DiAngelo acknowledges that white people hold social and institutional power over people of color. In response, a white man in the room pounds his fists on the table and yells that it's impossible for white people to get jobs anymore. DiAngelo observes that 38 of the 40 employees in the room are white—only two are people of color. She wonders why the man is so angry, and why the other white people are remaining silent in the face of his outburst.

White people in the United States live in a deeply unequal society, and they benefit from that inequality. As a result, they are insulated from racial stress and feel entitled to their advantage. Any challenge to their racial worldview is seen as a challenge to their identities as good, moral people, and they become defensive, angry, afraid, guilty, and often silent. These responses uphold the existing racial hierarchy because they restore racial comfort and repel any challenge to their worldview. This concept is what DiAngelo terms “white fragility.” It is a powerful means of control and protection of white people’s advantage.

As a diversity trainer, DiAngelo is amazed at how many white people are angry and defensive over the assertion that they are connected to racism. These reactions are especially strange in places where there are few or no people of color in their workplace, or among people who have few relationships with people of color. DiAngelo observes the beliefs that prop up these responses: the idea that only bad people are racist, and that racism only involves intentional acts. But recognizing racism as a system can help white people receive feedback, learn, and grow. However, at the moment, white people often respond with anger and denial rather than gratitude about being informed about problematic behavior so that they can correct it.

The book opens with a classic example of white fragility, though it doesn't yet name it as such. Addressing racism triggers this man's anger and causes him to frame white people as victims—despite the fact that white people clearly have an advantage in being hired at the company. By remaining silent on the issue, the other white people in the room are giving tacit approval to what the man is saying—exhibiting what DiAngelo will term “white solidarity.”



This passage defines the book's central topic: white fragility. White supremacy has given white people systemic advantages, but part of its power derives from the fact that it often goes unnamed and unchecked. Calling out white supremacy, by contrast, makes white people angry and uncomfortable—reactions that only deflect from the topic of white supremacy and thereby reinforces the racial status quo.



This section hints at the book's later discussion of the good/bad binary definition of racism. Because people believe that exhibiting racist behavior and being a good person are mutually exclusive, it is difficult to confront white people about their racist behavior because it challenges their self-image. As a result, they react with white fragility in order to defend their character, but this diverts the focus from remedying that racist behavior.



Race is a complicated social dilemma that influences every aspect of our lives: where we live, our schools, our friends and partners, our careers, how much money we will earn, and how healthy we will be. DiAngelo's goal is not to provide the solution to racism or to prove it exists (she starts with that assumption). Instead, her goal is to explain white fragility, how it protects racial inequality, and how to counteract it.

Here, DiAngelo introduces the idea that the systems of racism and white supremacy greatly impact people's lives, even today. These systems provide white Americans with great advantages, ranging from health to financial success. She also explicitly states her goal of demonstrating the problems with white people reacting with white fragility.



CHAPTER 1

As a white person born and raised in the United States, DiAngelo has a white frame of reference and worldview. However, like most white Americans, DiAngelo was taught to not draw attention to her race or behave as if it mattered. Being seen racially is a trigger of white fragility, and so the first challenge to white fragility means naming and understanding whiteness as a race.

Not naming whiteness as a race is a part of objectivity: the idea that people can be objective. Because white people are considered the norm or default in American society, they are rarely considered as a group that can be affected or advantaged by their race. As a result, calling out whiteness can trigger white fragility because it calls attention to the fact that white people do benefit from being white.



When people try to talk openly about race, white fragility quickly manifests as a range of reactions, including silence, defensiveness, and argumentation. But these responses prevent white people from engaging productively with issues of race and thus perpetuate the current racial hierarchy. Interrupting racism is crucial, but because white people generally understand racism as discrete acts committed by immoral individuals, many white people believe that they are not part of the problem and their learning is complete.

White fragility is problematic because it allows white people to deflect from racist behavior rather than working to remedy it. In addition, believing that only immoral people exhibit racism enables most people to believe that they are not and cannot be racist—because to do so would deny their positive self-image. However, the book suggests that this is not the case, and that white people need to sit with the discomfort that they, too, can perpetuate racism and need to commit to active anti-racist behavior.



A common aspect of white responses to discussions of racism come back two ideas: individualism and objectivity. Individualism holds that they are individuals that stand apart from others, even within social groups. Second, objectivity suggests that it is possible to be free from bias. These two ideologies make it difficult for white people to explore what it means to be white.

Individualism and objectivity allow people to consider themselves outside of white supremacy, because they can argue that they are not the same as “most white people” or that they do not hold bias. However, as the book will show, these ideologies are dangerously deceptive.



Individualism claims that there are no intrinsic barriers to individual success and that failure is not a consequence of social structures but instead comes from individual character. Of course, DiAngelo says, we know that this inherently isn't true: there's a difference between being a man or a woman, old or young, and rich or poor. We gain understanding about these different groups—that some are “better” than others—through media, textbooks, religion, jokes, traditions, and other aspects of culture. We acknowledge that Bill Gates's son was born into opportunity that others don't have, but white people still cling to the ideology of individualism when it comes to their own advantages and don't believe their racial group membership matters.

Addressing group identity also challenges objectivity. If group membership is relevant, it means that that group doesn't see the world from the universal perspective. This is a problem for white people, who are taught that having a racial viewpoint is being biased. But ignoring racial viewpoints only ensures that people won't examine or change them. This is critical, because what people say they believe isn't the same as what they believe subconsciously.

In DiAngelo's workshops, many white people protest that they aren't like most white people. One man explains that he is Italian American and Italians were once discriminated against, so white people can experience racism, too. DiAngelo notes that it would have been better to consider how Italian Americans were able to assimilate into the mainstream white experience, and how this assimilation has given the man advantages (the employees of the company he works for are overwhelmingly white). She implores people to let go of their individual narrative and grapple with their collective experiences.

White people have a simplistic understanding of race, as they've been taught that racists are mean, immoral people who intentionally dislike others because of their race. Because of this, saying that white people are racist would be considered deeply offensive. But DiAngelo explains that this is a misconception of what racism truly is.

DiAngelo expects white readers to feel some discomfort reading her book—but that this is key to moving forward in race relations. Feeling comfortable only perpetuates the status quo. She asks white people to consider that because they are white, there might be racial dynamics they can't see. They must be willing to experience discomfort but resist white fragility.

The example of Bill Gates's son helps readers recognize that certain groups of people—the rich, in this example—have advantages over others simply because of who they are (e.g., where they were born, who their parents are, etc.). And yet, white people largely still try to claim individualism, arguing that they do not have advantages because they are white despite the way in which white supremacy and racism still affect all of the United States' major institutions.



The problem with objectivity is that it allows white people to believe that they have a universal, unbiased experience. Yet the messages of white supremacy—the assumed superiority of white people—are ubiquitous in culture and institutions throughout the United States and the world. Thus, white people carry more subconscious bias than they know or admit, and as a result of this ignorance, they cannot work to change it.



Individualism causes white people to exempt themselves from the dynamics of white supremacy. But the example of the Italian man in DiAngelo's workshop concedes that white people can still face forms of discrimination like xenophobia or classism. However, she also emphasizes that even when facing other forms of oppression, white people still have inherent advantages over people of color simply as a result of being white—like advantages in hiring.



This section highlights the problems with the good/bad binary conception of racism. Believing that only bad people can be racist means that pointing out racism calls the person's character into question, and that person's reaction is usually to defend their character rather than working to change racist behavior.



DiAngelo emphasizes that discomfort is a natural response to addressing racism and must be embraced. Rather than reacting with defensiveness or anger, it is crucial for white people to sit with their discomfort and resist white fragility so that they can then understand their problematic behavior and work to change it.



CHAPTER 2

Many people learn that there are biological and genetic differences between races, which makes it easy to believe that many societal divisions are natural. However, race is actually socially constructed. Differences in eye color and skin color are superficial and emerged as adaptations to geography. It is important to understand how race became conceptualized as a biological difference and then how society organized along those racial lines.

When the United States was formed, freedom and equality were held up as noble ideologies. But at the same time, the U.S. economy was based on African people's enslavement and Indigenous people's displacement and genocide. This tension between these ideals and the cruel reality had to be reconciled, and Thomas Jefferson suggested that there were natural differences between the races. If science could prove Black and Indigenous people were inherently inferior, then these cruel actions could be justified.

In less than a century, Jefferson's suggestion of racial difference was taken as fact. The idea of racial inferiority was created to justify unequal treatment, and then it was further used to reinforce that unequal treatment. Historian Ibram X. Kendi argues that if people truly believe all humans are equal, disparity in condition can only be the result of systemic discrimination.

The term "white" did not appear in colonial law until the late 1600s. After slavery was abolished in the United States in 1865, establishing whiteness became important as a means of legalized discrimination against other races. To have full U.S. citizenship, a person had to be classified as white, and so various groups petitioned to be reclassified as white. Armenians won reclassification in courts as "Caucasian," but Japanese people did not earn the same distinction. The courts' opinions essentially stated that white people got to decide who was white.

Over time, different ethnic groups were reclassified. Irish, Italian, and Polish people have previously been excluded from being white. These groups largely became racially united through assimilation (e.g., speaking English and eating "American" foods). This also reinforced the perception that Americans were white. In addition, people who "look white" are largely treated as white in society and gain certain advantages from that status.

Understanding that race is socially constructed is key to understanding white supremacy, because white people used these biological adaptations to justify people of color's unequal treatment and exploitation.



Here, DiAngelo shows that racism was not based on racial differences but actually preceded race altogether. Race and white supremacy were created so that white people could credibly exploit and mistreat Black and Indigenous people in the United States. If they could prove that people of color were inferior to white people, then equality among these groups would not be necessary.



Here, DiAngelo highlights how racism was used to both justify and reinforce exploitation. Once differences between races were widely accepted as fact, laws exploiting people of color were systematically enacted—the effects of which are still felt today, as the book will continue to show. Ibram X. Kendi's book [Stamped from the Beginning](#), from which DiAngelo takes this quote, speaks to this idea.



The book stresses that this is one of the important aspects of understanding white supremacy and how it reinforces itself. Not only do white people gain institutional advantage, but they also get to determine who can access that power at any given time—institutional control that continues into the present. In other words, white people get to determine the narratives, laws, and practices around race.



Here, DiAngelo charts how ethnic groups such as Italians and Irish people assimilated into American culture and were gradually folded into the concept of whiteness. This not only illustrates how white people are seen as the norm in the United States, but also illustrates that certain groups who "look white" have attained greater advantages simply based on this fact, regardless of culture.



In addition, poor and working-class people were not always perceived as fully white but were eventually granted full entry into whiteness to exploit labor. Racial divisions have kept working classes from organizing against the upper class, as the white working class often focuses more grievances on other racial groups than on the white elite, who control economic policy. But even though working-class white people experience classism, they don't also experience racism. DiAngelo grew up in poverty, but she always knew that it was "better to be white."

Racism is different from prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice consists of biased thoughts, feelings, and stereotypes of groups of people. All people have prejudice, and these prejudices are largely shared because people in the same culture absorb the same messages. Yet the prevailing belief that prejudice is bad causes problems, because suggesting that white people have racial prejudice is like saying that they are bad people. Hearing this, white people then feel the need to defend their character rather than explore and challenge their prejudices. Discrimination is action based on prejudice, like exclusion, threats, slander, and violence, or mild unease from being around certain groups of people.

When a racial group's collective prejudice has legal authority and institutional control, it becomes racism—a structure that reaches far beyond individual people. Yet many people in the United States rationalize racial hierarchies as the outcome of a natural order resulting from genetics, individual effort, or talent. Those who don't succeed are "not as naturally capable, deserving, or hardworking." These beliefs obscure racism as a system of inequality that disadvantages groups of people.

Racism is deeply embedded in the fabric of the United States, and white people have always had more power than people of color. People of color may hold prejudice and discriminate against white people, but they lack the social and institutional power that transforms prejudice into racism. White people, on the other hand, hold power to infuse racial prejudice into laws, practices, and societal norms. So, for example, while a person of color can refuse to wait on a white person in a restaurant, people of color cannot pass legislation to prohibit white people from buying a home in a certain neighborhood.

This passage recognizes the advantages in being white, an position that counteracts individualism. DiAngelo faced classism growing up, but just because she struggled financially does not mean that she is exempt from white privilege, as she acknowledges that she was better off than people of color in poverty simply because she was white.



White people's understanding of prejudice and discrimination is similar to their understanding of racism. Because people believe that having prejudice or discriminating is bad, they try to hide or deny those thoughts and actions. This is another example of white fragility, because these reactions serve to deflect from those prejudices rather than acknowledging them and working to counteract them.



White supremacy and racism work in tandem in the United States, because white people have always had the institutional control to systematically discriminate against people of color. In addition, white people create the narratives that justify this treatment. For example, meritocracy (the belief that anyone can work hard and succeed) ignores systemic barriers and allows white people to justify those who don't succeed as lazy.



The distinction between racism and prejudice and discrimination is important, as it illustrates that white people cannot experience racism. White supremacy and the racism inherent in that ideology have systematically benefitted white people and continue to do so because of the institutional power that white people hold.



Many white people see racism as a thing of the past, but racial disparities continue in every institution. Scholar Marilyn Frye uses the metaphor of a **birdcage** to describe forces of oppression. Standing close to a birdcage makes it difficult to see all of the bars, and a person might not understand why the bird doesn't just go around the one or two wires they can see and fly away. But stepping back, a person can see how the barriers interlock and thoroughly restrict the bird. Like the person observing the birdcage, white people have a very limited view of racism, and as such, they rely on single situations, anecdotes, and exceptions rather than understanding the interlocking patterns and barriers that exist in the world.

Being perceived as white has privileges that are denied to others. It is not that white people can't face other kinds of discrimination, but that they don't face racism. DiAngelo stresses that it's important to understand how white people gain advantages as a result of a racism. Society views white people as the norm or standard for human, and people of color as a deviation from that norm. Whiteness is rarely acknowledged by white people as a quality that can have an impact on one's life and perceptions.

Even racism is often described as a problem for people of color rather than the responsibility of white people. For example, Jackie Robinson is often celebrated as the first African American person to break the color line in sports. Yet talking about him in this way suggests that Robinson was the first Black person who finally had what it took to play with white athletes, as if no other Black athlete could do so. DiAngelo asks readers to imagine if instead people described him as "the first black man whites allowed to play major-league baseball." This version highlights white people's institutional control and racism, rather than implying that Robinson was able to play with white people due to his merits and exceptionality, and no other Black player had the same skill.

Because white people are viewed as the norm, they are seen as insiders and granted the advantage of belonging. White people control all of society's major institutions and set policies and practices that others live by. They also reinforce the dominant narratives of society, like individualism and meritocracy, and use these narratives to explain the positions of other racial groups. In addition, white people often do not recognize or admit to white privilege and the norms that give them advantages. As a result, naming white people as a group with advantage often triggers white fragility.

The birdcage is a symbol for systemic oppression and counteracts narratives like objectivity and meritocracy. White people believe they are objective, but in reality they often look at racism from a narrow or distorted perspective, like the person observing the birdcage. Thus, they don't understand why it might be so difficult for the bird (people of color) to escape the cage (racism) and allows them to construct alternative narratives about the bird. But in reality, no matter how the bird might try, it is impossible to escape that cage because of the connected forces suppressing it.



This is another aspect of objectivity—white people view themselves as the “norm” in society and thus believe that their perspective is universal and unbiased. This idea contrasts with people of color, whom white people view as coming from a certain (racialized) perspective. But DiAngelo underscores that this narrative is false, as white people also view the world from a collective, biased perspective.



Jackie Robinson is an example of how meritocracy constructs a false narrative that obscures white supremacy. The story implies that Robinson was successful because he was exceptional. In reality, there were many players who were capable of playing in baseball leagues with white people, and it was white supremacy and institutional control that provided barriers—not a lack of talent. Calling attention to this institutional control helps highlight the barriers that white people put in place collectively.



White dominance allows white people to view themselves as individuals, not as a group with major institutional control. Then, it allows white people to construct narratives that further reinforce how their success and advantages are not historical and continuous, but are based on individual talent and hard work. Therefore, calling out the fact that white people do have an advantage because of white supremacy triggers white fragility, because that idea counteracts those narratives.



Most people associate white supremacy with white people beating Black people at lunch counters or bombing Black churches during the civil rights movement, or white nationalists in 2017 marching with torches in Virginia to protest the removal of Confederate war memorials. But broadly, white supremacy is a term that captures white people's assumed centrality and superiority, and the practices that result from this assumption. It refers not to individual people or acts, but to the overarching political, economic, and social system of white people's domination.

White supremacy goes largely unnamed as a political system, which is one of the reasons it becomes so powerful. The failure to acknowledge its existence helps to hold it in place. For example, in 2016–2017 in the United States, the richest people, the most powerful politicians, teachers, and media producers were all groups that were 85 to 100 percent white. These statistics show how powerful white people are across society. In practice, for example, white media producers disseminate representations of other people that are extremely narrow and problematic.

Resistance to the term white supremacy prevents people from examining how these messages shape society. Even white supremacists distanced themselves from the term, using “alt-right” and “white nationalist” instead to spread their message and make it more palatable. Derek Black, a former leader in the white nationalist movement, explains that people can talk about shutting down immigration and fighting affirmative action as long as they don't get outed as a white nationalist. Naming white supremacy is important because it makes the system visible and also highlights that it's white people, not people of color, who bear the responsibility of changing it.

Sociologist Joe Feagin coined the term “white racial frame” to describe how white people circulate and reinforce messages that white people are superior in culture and achievement while also perpetuating negative stereotypes and images of people of color. This happens through movies, television, news, stories, and jokes. These messages are also reinforced by the fact that social institutions (particularly privileged institutions) are controlled by white people, and so white dominance is taken for granted.

White supremacy persists in the present, illustrated by the recent white nationalist march in Charlottesville in 2017. And yet, much like DiAngelo illustrates that racism is not just made up of discrete acts or extreme violence, here she suggests that white supremacy isn't just extremism—it's also how the country has been structured to give white people institutional power based on the belief that they are superior.



These statistics illustrate how ubiquitous white supremacy is across the United States' institutions. White people set laws, teach history, drive economic decisions, and determine the narratives that the entire country consumes—all of which help white people maintain that power in the country.



Derek Black's statement illustrates how, as with racism, people are more interested in avoiding being associated with white supremacy than they are with counteracting the policies and institutions that comprise white supremacy. DiAngelo stresses the importance of calling out actions like fighting affirmative action and shutting down immigration as extensions of white supremacy so that white people will actively work to disrupt that ideology.



The “white racial frame” is an extension of white supremacy, because white supremacy has become so ingrained in the culture that it is the lens through which many people—but particularly white people—view the world. White people rarely consider the source of these messages and images, and how they might be biased. The fact that white supremacy can go so unnoticed by so many people in our narratives and institutions is part of what makes it so powerful.



DiAngelo asks white readers to imagine their earliest recollections of people of other races. She asks white people to consider if their parents told them that race didn't matter, and then if they lived around or interacted with people of color. If they didn't, what associations did readers have with neighborhoods and schools with people of color? Did they have any teachers of color? How did they know which schools were "better"?

Geography varies greatly by race, even if segregation is no longer encoded into laws. As such, children have to make sense of the incongruity between the claim that everyone is equal and the reality of segregation. DiAngelo asks readers to consider how people talk about white neighborhoods (good, safe, sheltered, clean, desirable) versus nonwhite neighborhoods (bad, dangerous, crime-ridden). Every minute in predominantly white environments reinforces white people's limited worldview, their assumed superiority, and a reliance on problematic depictions of people of color.

DiAngelo gives an example of how white parents teach their children one thing about race while practicing another. In a grocery store, if a white child sees a Black man and points out his skin color, a mother might react with some embarrassment, providing the message that the child shouldn't talk openly about race. But DiAngelo points out that the mother likely wouldn't react the same way if the child pointed out a white person's skin color, or if the man was handsome. In that way, the child is learning that there is something shameful or taboo about naming race, but only for Black people or people of color generally. And the child also learns that people should pretend not to notice aspects of a person that define some people as less valuable.

CHAPTER 3

Even though virtually no one claims to be racist, racism still exists. DiAngelo notes that she'll now cover various ways that racism has adapted over time to continue to produce racial disparity, but in such a way that white people can deny any involvement in it. Systems of oppression are deeply rooted and not overcome with the election of President Barack Obama, for example, or the passage of legislation. Advances are tenuous, as can be seen in the white nationalist protest in Charlottesville that led the president of the United States to say that there were "very fine people on both sides," which would have been unthinkable a few years earlier. Yet the same president can argue that he was the least racist person one could ever meet.

DiAngelo's questions counteract white people's purported objectivity. Even though most white parents explain that race doesn't matter and that everyone is equal, the messages that people receive about different neighborhoods or schools are nevertheless biased because white people often segregate themselves from neighborhoods and schools with people of color.



Even if children receive explicit messages that everyone is equal, the coded language of white neighborhoods as "good, safe, sheltered" versus other (nonwhite) neighborhoods as "bad, dangerous" reinforces white supremacy. It implies that white neighborhoods are inherently better than neighborhoods with predominantly people of color—therefore the races are not equal.



This example points out the issue with white people claiming objectivity about race. While many white people purport to be color blind, DiAngelo stresses that this is simply a pretense, and that white people actually do treat Black and white people differently. In addition, white parents teach their children to not talk about race and pretend to be objective even when they clearly treat people differently—as though being Black is shameful.



Again, the book illustrates that white supremacy and its systems are not simply a thing of the past—and from DiAngelo's perspective, being more openly racist may even be more acceptable in the United States now than it was in the past few decades. Yet this chapter explores how racism has adapted and come to be defined in such a way that it is easy for white people to deflect and deny it.



Color-blind racism is an example of racism's adaptiveness. The idea is based on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, in which he hoped that one day he might be judged by his character, not his skin color. White people took this to mean that if they pretended not to see race, racism would end. In other words, it became racist to acknowledge race.

DiAngelo recalls a workshop she was co-leading with an African American man. In it, one white participant claimed that she didn't see race. The man responded that pretending not to see race was not helpful to him, as it denied him the reality of the racism that he faces. She projected her sense of belonging and the feeling that race doesn't matter onto him. But DiAngelo emphasizes that people *do* see race, and countless studies have proven that people of color are discriminated against. Still, pointing out racism—even with empirical evidence—can still be met with defensiveness, because many people believe that racial discrimination can only be intentional.

Averse racism is a term used for enacting racism while still maintaining a positive self-image. Some examples include white people rationalizing racial segregation as unfortunate but necessary to access "good schools," using racially coded terms like "urban" or "diverse," or rationalizing that workplaces are all white because people of color don't apply.

DiAngelo gives an example of averse racism she observed: a white friend was describing a white couple who moved to New Orleans and bought a house for \$25,000. DiAngelo's friend explained that the couple had to buy a gun, and the woman was afraid to leave the house. DiAngelo knows immediately that they moved to a Black neighborhood, but because her friend never mentioned race—they both had plausible deniability about perpetuating negative racial stereotypes.

Readers might ask why acknowledging danger is a sign of racism if the neighborhood is genuinely dangerous. DiAngelo explains that research in implicit bias has shown that white people will perceive danger simply by the presence of Black people—white people cannot trust perceptions when it comes to race and crime. This kind of conversation is what Toni Morrison calls "race talk": the explicit insertion of racial signals that elevate white people while demeaning people of color, and especially Black people.

Color-blind racism is an example of objectivity. Claiming not to see race helped white people establish the idea that they hold no bias because they treat everyone the same. But this passage hints that this is simply another form of racism, because claiming not to see race doesn't prevent a person from maintaining unconscious bias.



Color-blind ideology may have sprung out of good intentions, but it ignores the fact that white people carry a great deal of unconscious bias. In addition, racism isn't only constituted of intentional acts carried out by bad people. But racism has adapted so that naming it at all is met with white fragility, because talking about seeing race now challenges white people's objectivity or their belief that they don't see race (and therefore are not racist).



Averse racism still upholds white supremacy because it helps reinforce systems of segregation or other negative stereotypes—using the coded language cited here—while still allowing white people to maintain plausible deniability about perpetuating racism.



Referencing the cheap house, the gun, and the dangerous neighborhood quietly signals to DiAngelo that the neighborhood is predominantly Black, and it reinforces negative stereotypes in doing so. Yet the plausible deniability that DiAngelo and her friend have allows them to maintain a façade of objectivity and claim that they hold no racial bias because they never explicitly mentioned race. This is why, if confronted about these views, the friend would likely react with white fragility and claim that she harbors no bias.



Even though white people believe that racism is composed of intentional acts and that they can be objective, in reality they carry a great deal of implicit bias, which stems from and reinforces white supremacy. White people implicitly associate Black people with danger, and then perpetuate those stereotypes as in the example DiAngelo describes with her and her friend's discussion of the couple in New Orleans.



DiAngelo notes that averse racism occurs all the time—examples include descriptions of neighborhoods she would receive when moving to a new state, or white students talking about their “sheltered” hometowns. News stories that describe violent crime in white suburbs as “shocking” strengthen these depictions. Additionally, white people rarely consider how safe their spaces feel to people of color (for example, Trayvon Martin’s experience in a gated white community). In reality, white people have historically perpetrated far more violence against people of color than the other way around.

Many white young adults believe that they are more tolerant than previous generations. But in a significant study, 626 white college students kept journals and recorded every instance of racial issues, images, or understanding they observed. Several commonalities exist in the thousands of examples they collected. The first is how much explicit racism young people are exposed to and participate in. The second is the idea that if someone is a good person, that person cannot be racist—like one student who is glad her friend told a racist joke without any people of color around, because if someone else who didn’t know him heard, they might “misunderstand” him.

The researchers also documented the white students’ racially conscious behaviors, like acting overly nice to people of color, avoiding them, using code words, mimicking Black mannerisms and speech, and being careful not to use racist terms. But still, the majority of racist behaviors occurred “backstage,” meaning in all-white company. This behavior keeps racism circulating, because the students are socially penalized for challenging racist jokes or behavior. These cultural norms insist that white people hide racism from people of color and deny it to themselves, but not actually challenge it in any way.

CHAPTER 4

Race shapes the lives of white people in the United States by providing white people with a sense of belonging. As DiAngelo moves through her daily life, her race is unremarkable when she looks at images from movies, magazines, or shades of makeup. She belongs with her teachers, counselors, classmates, the heroes in history, her doctors, and her dentists. In almost every situation deemed normal, neutral, or prestigious, DiAngelo belongs racially.

Using terms like “sheltered” for white neighborhoods or describing violence as “shocking” implies that violence in these neighborhoods is out of the ordinary, contrasted with the implication that violence in nonwhite neighborhoods is the norm. Yet white neighborhoods are not safe for everyone—DiAngelo brings up the example of Trayvon Martin, an African American teenager shot by George Zimmerman in a gated community in Florida simply because he looked suspicious.



This example illustrates the good/bad binary definition of racism that DiAngelo has been addressing throughout the book. Even though this student’s friend is perpetuating racist behavior by telling a racist joke, she doesn’t want people to “misunderstand” him—that is, to think that he is racist and therefore a bad person. She is more focused on making sure that other people don’t perceive him as racist than calling out his racist behavior.



This passage illustrates the result of the lessons white people learn as children—don’t talk openly about race in public. It is more important to carry the appearance of objectivity than interrupting systems of racism and white supremacy. But DiAngelo suggests that the opposite needs to be true—to talk openly about race and to challenge white supremacy in doing so.



This passage illustrates some of the more subtle ways that white supremacy manifests itself. Because white people are both considered the norm and have the power to shape society according to that norm, they are often oblivious to the ways in which they belong that people of color might not.



Any situation in which DiAngelo might not belong racially is usually in temporary, easily avoidable situations. In fact, she has been warned to avoid situations in which she would be a minority—other people often present these situations as “scary, dangerous, or ‘sketchy.’” Yet if the environment is good, nice, or valuable, DiAngelo can be confident that she will racially belong there.

DiAngelo doesn’t carry the weight of her race and how others might feel about her. She has countless role models across an array of fields when she looks for a job, and virtually anyone hiring—in addition to the majority of people she’ll work with—will be white like her. Once hired, she won’t have to deal with her coworkers’ assumptions that she only got the job because of her race. Or if there are people of color at the organization who resent her hire, she can lean on her white coworkers. And so she can focus on her work and productivity: the psychological advantage of belonging translates into material returns.

DiAngelo has not been taught to view racism as her responsibility. Raised in a culture of white supremacy, she has an assumption of racial superiority and she doesn’t have to navigate the psychic drain of dealing with racism. In addition, she has freedom of movement. Once, she invited her co-worker Deborah to get away for a weekend in northern Idaho. Deborah pointed out that the town is near a place where the Aryan Nation is building a compound. Even without this openly racist group nearby, Deborah did not want to be isolated in a virtually all-white environment.

White people are also held up as the norm for humanity—their race is rarely named. In school, writers that everyone is expected to read include Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Jane Austen, and William Shakespeare. These writers are seen as representing the universal human experience, while students read Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison for the Black perspective. Virtually any representation of human is based on white people’s norms and images, like images of Adam and Eve, flesh-colored makeup, or educational models of the human body.

Racially coded language shapes DiAngelo’s perspective, as she learns that situations with white people are good, nice, and valuable, while those with people of color are “scary” or “dangerous”—stereotypes that reinforce white supremacy.



Since she’s white, DiAngelo doesn’t have to deal with the potential discrimination in hiring—returning to the idea that DiAngelo “belongs” virtually anywhere she would want to be—but she also doesn’t have to deal with the potential backlash that she might face from people who assume that she was hired because of her race, not her skillset. This is another aspect of white fragility, in which white people feel that they are being overlooked for jobs despite the fact that people of color have faced much more discrimination in hiring.



Deborah’s concern illustrates the extra considerations that people of color have to give to the spaces they inhabit—she is not as free to visit a rural town as DiAngelo because it is a virtually all-white environment. This is an example of how white supremacy adds mental hardship that white people do not have to deal with in the same way.



That William Shakespeare and Jane Austen represent the “universal” human experience illustrates white people’s perception that they are objective. They believe that they do not have a biased perspective, in contrast to Toni Morrison or James Baldwin who have a “Black perspective.” Yet this conceals the fact that the white experience is not a universal human experience with a distinct bias and viewpoint.



White solidarity is the unspoken agreement among white people to protect white advantage and not confront other white people about racism. This requires both silence and tacit agreement to protect racial supremacy. Many white people can relate to the big family dinner where an uncle says something racist, but no one challenges him because no one wants to ruin the dinner.

There are consequences of breaking white solidarity—accusations of being politically correct or angry, humorless, and combative. When white people stay silent during a racist joke in the workplace, on the other hand, they gain social capital like being fun, cooperative, and a team player. White people justify their silence by not being the person who made the joke, but silence is tacit agreement that allows racism to circulate through the culture.

White people openly reminisce about the “good old days,” but claiming that the past is better than the present is a hallmark of white supremacy. Consider any period in the past from people of color’s perspective: slavery, the attempted genocide of Indigenous people, lynching, mob violence, Japanese American internment, segregation, bans on voting, employment and educational discrimination, redlining, mass incarceration, racist media representations, and untold and perverted historical accounts, to name a few. The past was positive for white people, on the other hand, because their positions went unchallenged.

Even now, there has been no actual loss of power for the white elite. Of the 50 richest people on earth, 29 are American and all of those 29 are white. Similarly, the white working class has always held the top positions in blue-collar fields while resenting people of color. This resentment is misdirected, given that the people who control the economy are the white elite. For example, in the U.S. in the last 30 years, the bottom 50 percent of workers have had zero income growth, whereas incomes of the top 1 percent have grown by 300 percent. Even the call to “Make America Great Again,” DiAngelo says, diverted blame away from the white elite and towards people of color for the current conditions of the white working class.

White solidarity is another aspect of white fragility. It is easier for white people to avoid discomfort by not addressing racism, as in the example of the racist uncle at dinner. But this means that racism is allowed to perpetuate unchecked. And it is notable that white people don’t want to “ruin” the dinner by combatting racism, highlighting how even white people know that other white people get defensive when their racist comments are addressed—to the point where argument over addressing racism can “ruin” a dinner.



Again, white fragility is difficult to get around because of the discomfort white people also endure in confronting racism. On the other hand, not confronting racism is rewarded through social capital. Still, it is more important to endure discomfort in order to oppose racism and dismantle white supremacy.



This section illustrates how racism and white supremacy has been embedded in the U.S.’s history, ranging in time and across different racial groups’ experiences. These are just a few examples of different policies that were created based on the belief that white people were superior. These policies then put people of color at an even greater political and economic disadvantage. In this way, white supremacy created a self-fulfilling narrative that continues to this day.



DiAngelo uses these statistics to prove that white supremacy continues to disadvantage people of color. Not only are the wealthiest Americans all white, but even in comparing groups among the working class, white people still have a distinct advantage over people of color. “Make America Great Again,” President Trump’s slogan, implies a call to return to a more idealized past—but DiAngelo emphasizes that this is only for white people. The fact that the white working class often believes their problems stem from people of color illustrates how white supremacy continues to set narratives that protect the white elite.



The past also often included segregation in schools and neighborhoods. Many white people fled from cities to suburbs to escape the influx of people of color (termed “white flight”). There was huge resistance to busing children from one neighborhood into a school in another to account for racial segregation. White flight is justified by the belief that people of color (especially Black people) are more prone to crime and that white neighborhoods are safer. This ironically distorts the actual direction of danger that has historically existed between white and Black people.

It has been documented that police stop Black and Latinx people more often than white people for the same activities and judges give people of color harsher sentences. Judges often attribute crime that white youths commit to external factors (e.g., coming from a single-parent home or having a hard time) as opposed to Black and Latinx youth, whose crimes they attribute to internal factors (e.g., they are “naturally more prone to crime” or “more animalistic”).

Simply getting white people to admit white privilege is difficult. Many people view privilege as something they passively receive, which obscures the dimensions of racism that are actively maintained. In addition, the expectation that people of color should teach white people about racism is another aspect of white racial innocence, as it assumes that racism has nothing to do with white people, relieving them of any guilt or need to do work.

Life in the United States is deeply shaped by racial segregation, and white people are the most likely to choose segregation. Though they don't see people of color around them, few white adults acknowledge a lack of racial diversity as a problem. Segregation is somewhat lessened for poor white people in urban areas who may live near people of color. But even in this scenario, upward mobility is a great goal in the United States, and the social environment gets whiter the higher a person climbs. DiAngelo grew up poor with many people of color around her, but she knew that to improve her life, she would not remain in those spaces.

Meritocracy is another important ideology in the U.S., but neighborhoods and schools are clearly separate and unequal. Rather than changing conditions so that public education is equal, white people allow other people's children to endure conditions that would be unacceptable for their own kids. White people seek out schools based on the best test scores, but schools with more nonwhite students receive fewer resources and therefore do not have better test scores, which leads to further racial segregation.

This passage illustrates how yearning for the past centers white people and is a biased perspective, because the past has always included greater oppression of people of color (harking back to DiAngelo's list at the beginning of this chapter). Segregation—which still persists to this day, even if it is no longer coded into laws—demonstrates how white people are willing to buy into white supremacy even at the cost of inequality for people of color in schools, for example.



This is another example of how racism and white supremacy manifest in the present day. The judges use racially coded language like “prone to crime” or “animalistic” that relies on stereotypes and caricatures to justify the sentences they give to people of color. This justification and harsher sentencing then reinforce the negative stereotypes white people have about people of color—because they are convicted for crimes more often—without ever naming race.



Again, white people assume themselves to be objective and place themselves on the good side of the good/bad binary definition of racism. But this abdicates them of the responsibility to confront racism. In reality, DiAngelo suggests, racism is a problem that can only be solved by white people—and the first step is to admit their complicity in that system.



Segregation and the desire for social mobility are other aspects of white supremacy. Because the most desirable spaces in society are white spaces, DiAngelo notes, people actively seek them out. This is where white privilege comes in—DiAngelo, for instance, inherently has a greater sense of belonging to those spaces and is more readily accepted into them because she is white.



Meritocracy is another Western ideology that obscures white supremacy and systemic racism. While white people can say that they are choosing schools based on test scores, in reality white supremacy has created an unequal system that gives greater resources to schools with white students, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy about which schools are the best.



Perhaps the most profound message of racial segregation is that people of color's absence from white people's lives is not a loss. If white people truly believed that there was value in cross-racial relationships for themselves and for their children, they would seek them out.

This is a particularly deep-seated aspect of white supremacy: the current system of segregation inherently rests on the idea that white people feel they don't need people of color in their lives.



Summing up her points from the chapter, DiAngelo explains that society creates a common set of racial patterns: preference for racial segregation, failure to understand that white people are part of a group and that they are not objective, unwillingness to listen and learn, the need to maintain white solidarity, and defensiveness about any suggestion that white people are connected to racism. These attitudes shape every aspect of our lives and telling people to treat everyone the same will not override this socialization.

This passage sums up many of the book's key ideas: ideologies like individualism, objectivity, and meritocracy make it difficult for white people to understand the advantages they possess as a group, which consequently prevents them from dismantling white supremacy. And when those ideologies are challenged and white people are forced to acknowledge their privilege, they often react with white fragility.



CHAPTER 5

Prior to the civil rights movement, it was socially acceptable for white people to openly proclaim their belief in racial superiority. However, because the struggle for civil rights was televised, white people across the nation watched in horror as Black men, women, and children were attacked by police dogs and fire hoses and beaten at lunch counters. Not wanting to be associated with these racist acts of violence, white people became far more reticent to admit to racial prejudice, and being a good, moral person became mutually exclusive with being complicit in racism.

This section provides some background on how racism's definition has changed and adapted. During the civil rights movement, racism became associated with intentional and extreme violent acts against Black people who were peacefully protesting. White people consequently didn't want to admit any kind of racial prejudice for fear that they would be associated with immoral people.



While defining racism as bad was a positive change, this also meant that suggesting white people exhibited racist behavior became a kind of character assassination. As a result, white people put all energy into deflecting the charge of racism rather than reflecting on their behavior. In this way, the "good/bad binary" makes it impossible to talk to white people about racism. It is also a false dichotomy, as all people hold prejudice and all white people are affected by and benefit from racism.

The good/bad binary definition of racism is a key foundation of white fragility. Because people believe that anyone who displays racist behavior or takes part in the system of racism is an immoral, extreme, or violent person, white people are very offended by the suggestion that they might do or say something racist. As a result, receiving feedback on racially problematic behavior often causes white fragility.



Although individual racist acts occur, the focus on them masks the overarching structure of racism and the need to challenge this larger system. And when white people place themselves on the "not racist" side of the good/bad binary, they do not feel the need to take any further action, because they believe racism is not their responsibility. They will not think critically about racism or use their position to challenge inequality.

When white people believe that they are good, moral people, they are then able to completely distance themselves from racism. The good/bad binary thus prevents white people from examining their own racist behaviors and beliefs and using their positions of power to disrupt racist systems.



When white people's racism is challenged, white fragility erupts. For example, in a workshop with educators, a white teacher told a story about an interaction she had with a parent in which she learned that she didn't truly understand the children of color. But she tells it in such a way that she imitates a Black mother in a racist way. As her story comes to close, DiAngelo realizes that she must address the stereotype, even though she risks the woman's defensiveness and the workshop getting off track.

DiAngelo thanks the woman for sharing her interaction but asks her not to tell the story in the same way again, as it enforces racist stereotypes. The woman reacts defensively, but DiAngelo tries to get her to listen. During a later break, several African American teachers and one white teacher thank DiAngelo for her refreshing example of how to break with white solidarity. But several white teachers also approached DiAngelo to let her know that the woman telling the story was very upset and is leaving the group. Even a white person participating in a class on racism could not handle feedback on how her racism was unintentionally manifesting.

It is common to feel defensive when provided with feedback on one's racist behavior, as many people believe they are being told they are a bad person. But this defensiveness only protects problematic behavior. In addition, the belief that racism can only manifest as discrete, individual, intentional, and malicious acts makes it unlikely that white people will acknowledge any of their own actions as racism.

Responses to accusations of racism fall into two patterns: the first set claims color-blindness (the person does not see race, so therefore they are free of racism), and the second values diversity (the person knows people of color, so therefore they are free of racism). DiAngelo points out that both kinds of statements try to exempt the person from any responsibility or participation in the problem, and thus they protect the racial status quo.

These claims rest on a framework, like a **pier**. A pier stretches out over the water, appearing to float on its own, but it is propped up by an underlying structure. The top of the pier signifies the surface aspects of the claims, and these claims are propped up by underlying beliefs. If interacting with people of color is evidence that a person is not racist, by that definition racists can only be people who cannot tolerate interacting with people of color at all. But of course this is not true, as even avowed white nationalists interact with people of color.

This story emphasizes that even people who believe that they are progressing and learning more about racism can still be racist. What's more, white fragility makes it so that DiAngelo even questions whether to address the woman's behavior, knowing that the woman's white fragility will get the workshop completely off track and focus on this woman's response.



While some of the teachers—particularly the teachers of color—appreciate that DiAngelo makes the effort to interrupt racist behavior, DiAngelo nevertheless receives criticism for this, which highlights how problematic white fragility can be. Rather than sitting with her discomfort and taking DiAngelo's feedback as a learning opportunity, the woman telling the story reacts defensively—believing DiAngelo has insulted her character—and closes herself off to further learning about disrupting racism, at least for now, by leaving the workshop altogether.



When a person reacts with white fragility upon receiving feedback about their racist behavior, it makes it impossible to address racism. A defensive reaction deflects all focus from the issue of dismantling racism and white supremacy and instead puts the focus on making the white people receiving feedback more comfortable.



Both of these sets of reasonings are tactics white people may use to prove that they are not racist, rather than actively engaging with feedback and working to remedy racist behavior.



The pier metaphor illustrates how much people's deflections rely on other (often false) underlying assumptions like the good/bad binary definition of racism. When white people use the fact that they know people of color as evidence that they are not racist, it implies that they believe only people who cannot stand to interact with people of color and/or intentionally avoid them can be racist.



While some white people claim to treat everyone the same, DiAngelo knows that this is impossible given white people's socialization. People of color who hear white people say that they treat everyone the same usually think that the person is unaware of their biases, and people of color then brace themselves for another exchange based in white denial.

Even people who have cross-racial friendships still invoke the good/bad binary, claiming that their friendship puts them on the not-racist side of the binary. But these friendships do not block out the dynamics of racism in the society at large, or in the friendships themselves. Many people of color have told DiAngelo that they initially tried to talk about racism with their white friends, but their friends got defensive or invalidated the person's experiences and so they stopped sharing these experiences.

DiAngelo offers counternarratives to some of the most popular claims she hears for why a white person isn't racist. "I was taught to treat everyone the same" implies that the person doesn't understand that they cannot be free from bias. "I marched in the 60s" implies again that racism can only be conscious intolerance, which is untrue. Some argue that they were the minority at their school and experienced racism themselves—but again, that white person was experiencing prejudice and discrimination, not racism. The society at large is still reinforcing white supremacy, and it is likely that white students at a school where they were minorities were treated better by teachers, and the textbooks and curriculum still reinforced a preference for whiteness.

DiAngelo then addresses those who claim that their parents were not racist and taught them not to be racist. This is not possible, she says, because racism is comprised of systems, not individual acts. Moreover, living a segregated life is a powerful message in and of itself. While some people claim that children today are more open, countless studies have proven this to be false. In one study, white children allocated less money to black children than fellow white children—but only when an adult wasn't present. Thus, they were not less racially biased, but instead they had simply learned to *hide* their racism.

The defense of "race has nothing to do with it," is the same as claiming color-blindness, which DiAngelo has already proven is impossible and does not preclude racism. Claim that focusing on race is what divides people is a particularly pernicious claim because it posits the problem as the *naming* of inequality, not the inequality itself. But unequal power relations cannot be challenged if they are not acknowledged.

The other assumption—that people can't be racist because they treat everyone the same—ignores the idea that objectivity is impossible and that white people have been socialized in a culture of white supremacy that is biased against people of color.



Even white people who have friends of color are not exempt from racist behavior. DiAngelo's anecdotes illustrate that people of color with white friends also recognize white fragility and therefore avoid bringing up racism with their white friends. Thus, even the absence of feedback from people of color doesn't mean that white people don't exhibit racist behaviors. Instead, it demonstrates that people of color often expect white fragility even from people they know and like, showing how ubiquitous it is.



The common responses to receiving feedback on racist behavior show how pernicious white people's socialization is and proves many of the book's arguments. People are not excused from racism simply because they profess tolerance or progressive political beliefs. And just because someone experienced hardship or even discrimination—like the white student who was a minority at their school—does not make them exempt from displaying racism and benefiting from white privilege.



Ironically, the fact that DiAngelo can so easily categorize white people's responses to accusations of racism ones proves another point. White people often respond collectively with white fragility because of their common experiences as white people—not in spite of it. This shows how white people do share commonalities and privileges as a group, because they largely respond in the same way.



As noted in the discussion of color-blind ideology, the ability to avoid the discussion of race or the pretense that race doesn't matter in and of itself supports white supremacy because allows the current racial status quo to continue unchecked.



While speaking up against explicitly racist actions is critical, it is important not to use them to construct a false binary. Instead, DiAngelo writes that she thinks of herself as being on a continuum, actively seeking to interrupt racism in every context. While it's uncomfortable for white people to talk about or admit to their own racism, they have to do so in order to challenge it rather than protect it.

This passage describes an alternative to the good/bad binary definition of racism. DiAngelo envisions a continuum, wherein people constantly work to disrupt racism rather than believing that they can be completely free of it.



CHAPTER 6

Talking about white people as a group is important because it interrupts individualism. But talking about people of color as a group can be problematic because it collapses many racial groups into one generic category. This chapter, DiAngelo says, will explore anti-Black sentiment specifically. These feelings arise in white people when passing Black strangers on the streets, seeing stereotypical depictions in the media, and hearing warnings and jokes between white people.

This anti-Black sentiment has roots in white supremacy, as maintaining white supremacy—the belief that white people are superior and the practices that stem from that belief—is contingent on the belief that other groups are inferior. The instances cited here are examples of how this manifests today.



Whiteness has always been predicated on Blackness—creating an “inferior” Black race simultaneously created the “superior” white race. Scholars have argued that white people project onto Black people the aspects that they don't want to own in themselves: white masters of slaves described them as lazy, even as they did backbreaking work. Today, white people often depict Black people as dangerous, despite the fact that white people have perpetrated more violence against Black people.

Not only do white people create the narrative of Black people as an “inferior” race, but they also create and control the narratives that reinforce that idea, like the idea that Black people are lazy or dangerous despite the work Black people did as slaves or the violence that white people commit.



White resentment endures about affirmative action. Black people have been discriminated against in hiring since the end of slavery. In the late 1960s, affirmative action was instituted to remedy this discrimination. There is a lot of misinformation about affirmative action: people commonly believe that Black people are given preferential treatment in hiring and that a specific number of people of color must be hired to fill a quota. But these beliefs are untrue: affirmative action is a tool to ensure that quality minority candidates are given the same employment opportunities, and there are no quotas.

The misinformation about affirmative action is another example of how white people shape narratives that benefit white supremacy. They spread the myth that affirmative action counters ideas of meritocracy—believing that it upends the idea that the most qualified person for the job should be hired. In reality, affirmative action tries to prevent qualified minority candidates from experiencing discrimination.



Ironically, white women have been affirmative action's greatest beneficiaries. No employer is required to hire an unqualified person of color, but employers (meaning state and governmental agencies; affirmative action doesn't apply to private companies) must be able to articulate why they didn't hire a qualified person of color. Affirmative action has been systematically chipped away at, and African Americans continue to be the most underrepresented group at the organizational leadership level. And yet white people still carry outrage at how unfair affirmative action has been to them.

That white women have been the biggest beneficiaries of affirmative action shows that white people's anger over affirmative action is misplaced. This is another example of white fragility, as white people use their outrage over the policy to deflect from white supremacy, racism, and the discrimination people of color continue to experience in hiring.



Other research illustrates white people's disdain for African American people, from the school-to-prison pipeline, to mass incarceration, to white flight. One can see anti-Black sentiment in rejoinders to Black Lives Matter, the justification of brutality towards Black children and adults, and the comparison of the "alt-right" movement with the Black Panther Party. One can see it in how society buries the trauma Black people have experienced historically by dehumanizing Black people. One sees it in the constant discussion of the white working class in the 2016 presidential election with no concern for the Black working class, who remain on the bottom of every social and economic measure.

DiAngelo believes that white people fundamentally hate Blackness because it reminds them that they are capable and guilty of perpetrating harm. White people thus justify Black people's treatment through the beliefs that Black people are inherently undeserving. One sees this in the indignation at NFL players who kneel during the national anthem. One sees it in the outrage of the crowd of white progressives at a Bernie Sanders rally when they were asked to grant four and a half minutes of silence to honor Michael Brown, an unarmed black man shot by police in Ferguson, Missouri.

White people also use Black people to feel warm-hearted and noble, as in the "white savior narrative"—the idea that white people can "save" Black people through their kindness and generosity. DiAngelo uses the example of [The Blind Side](#), a hugely popular movie from 2009. The film is based on the true story of the Tuohy family, who rescued Michael Oher from poverty and helped him go on to become an NFL player.

Although the movie was popular with white audiences, all of the Black characters reinforce negative racial stereotypes: Oher as a childlike gentle giant in poverty, his drug-addicted single mother with children from unknown fathers, an incompetent welfare worker, and the gang members in Oher's crime-ridden neighborhood. The movie makes it clear that the only way Oher can be saved is through a white family's benevolence and bravery. It further emphasizes that Oher is lacking in intellectual abilities, while his talent derives from "protective instinct."

These are more examples of how white supremacy is both integral to the United States' policies, its social landscape, and its narratives. In terms of the school-to-prison pipeline and mass incarceration, disciplinary policies in schools criminalize students of color, which ultimately funnels them to prison because law enforcement is already a part of their lives. Mass incarceration is a system whereby prisons and the government benefits from those in prison—predominantly minorities—through unpaid labor done in the prisons. The narratives cited here include the ideas that violence, mistreatment, or ignoring Black people is justified.



Again, the book illustrates how white people perpetuate white supremacy even to this day, using widely known examples like the kneeling NFL players to illustrate how the outrage against them is misdirected white supremacy. Noting the Bernie Sanders rally is particularly striking because it shows that even white people who consider themselves progressive can still uphold white supremacy.



[The Blind Side](#) is an example of how narratives based in white supremacy can largely go unnoticed and even celebrated in the culture, but further inspection illustrates that these narratives are problematic and reinforce negative stereotypes.



Each of these points illustrate how the film reinforces Black people's negative stereotypes, like drug use or poverty, contrasted with the Tuohys' affluence and benevolence. The specific reference to "protective instinct," is also notable, because while it seems outwardly positive, it reinforces that Oher is only good at something instinctual while he lacks intelligence or other capabilities.



The film, told from the white perspective, reinforces the idea that white people are Black people's saviors, and that individual Black people can overcome their circumstances with white people's help. It also suggests that Black neighborhoods are inherently dangerous and criminal, and that virtually all Black people are poor, incompetent, and unqualified. The fact that the Tuohy's are the "good whites" who deal with individual bad white people they encounter in other places also reinforces the good/bad binary.

In addition to the film's stereotypical narratives, it also reinforces the good/bad binary that DiAngelo has addressed throughout the book. The Tuohys are "good whites" who are not racist because of their generosity and willingness to take Oher into their home. The other white people who criticize or judge the Tuohys, by contrast, are bad, immoral people. But this reinforces the false idea that only bad people can be racist.



CHAPTER 7

The previous chapters illustrate how white people are insulated from race-based stress. But when ideologies like color-blindness, meritocracy, and individualism are challenged, intense reactions are common. This is due to social taboos, the good/bad binary, internalized superiority, and a deep investment in a system that benefits white people. Most people have limited information about what racism is and how it works. Even isolated courses in "cultural competency" use racially coded language like "urban" or "disadvantaged" but rarely "white" or "privileged."

White people rarely have to address racism with direct language, instead using coded language cited here. This moment harks back to earlier in the book when DiAngelo's friend bought a cheap house in a sketchy area, and DiAngelo immediately knew that the friend was implying that it's a predominantly Black neighborhood. Beliefs like meritocracy, individualism, and objectivity prevent white people from considering their privilege, so when they are forced to address this aspect of society, they instead react with white fragility as a way to deflect from facing these issues directly.



Even when programs address racism directly, white people commonly respond with anger, withdrawal, guilt, argumentation, and avoidance—all of which cause facilitators to deflect from addressing racism directly. Most white people simply never have to build the capacity to endure racial stress—DiAngelo only started to when she became a diversity trainer.

This passage highlights how typical white fragility responses—such as anger, withdrawal, and defensiveness—are tools of white supremacy because they deflect from addressing racism directly and therefore uphold the racial status quo.



DiAngelo cites anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus to understand white fragility. Habitus indicates how people perceive the world around them and react to it based their "field" and "capital." Field is a person's environment, and capital is the social value people hold in a given field. Capital can shift with the field—like a school custodian coming upstairs to speak with a receptionist, where the receptionist has more status. But when the receptionist goes downstairs to the supply room, the custodian has more control.

Habitus helps people understand and navigate both typical and atypical social situations, and includes how race, class, and gender will play into those power dynamics. Habitus helps people maintain social comfort as they navigate unfamiliar situations—similarly, white fragility helps white people restore their comfort in discussions of race.



When social cues are unfamiliar or when they challenge a person's capital, they'll use habitus to regain social comfort. In this sense, white fragility is a form of habitus in discussions of race. White people cannot tolerate challenges to their objectivity, taboos on talking openly about race, or white solidarity. And so, when met with these challenges, white people are at a loss with how to respond constructively and respond with white fragility.

The reason that people react with white fragility is because of their discomfort with talking about race, placing them outside of a typical habitus. Thus, white fragility is a tool to help return people to social comfort, thereby also maintaining white supremacy and blocking any challenge to it.



DiAngelo once mentored a teacher, Mr. Roberts, who made inappropriate racial comments to a Black female student. In one workshop session, Mr. Roberts told DiAngelo about a colleague who called one of her Black students “girl.” When the student took offense, another Black student said that the teacher called all her students “girl.” Mr. Roberts used this story to express his dismay over not being able to “say anything anymore.” Neither he nor his colleague considered why the student might have taken offense. Mr. Roberts was maintaining white solidarity by validating their shared perspective and invalidating the Black student. As a result, the teachers increased racial divides rather than bridged them.

The episode with Mr. Roberts illustrates how white fragility maintains rather than challenges white supremacy. He is supporting another white colleague’s behavior and maintaining his idea that the student was just being overly sensitive, rather than considering the students’ perspective and bridging a racial divide. Thus, he is able to return to racial comfort and maintain that neither of them is racist rather than being open to feedback and working to change racist behavior.



CHAPTER 8

In one of DiAngelo’s workplace workshops, a white woman named Karen got upset when her only colleague of color, Joan, pointed out that Karen often talks over her. Karen didn’t understand what that had to do with race, and she exclaimed that she was going to stop talking altogether because she couldn’t say anything right. This highlights Karen’s white fragility because she positioned herself as the one who was being treated unfairly. In an NPR poll, a majority of white people believe that discrimination against white people exists, but a much smaller percentage say that they have experienced it.

Karen’s reaction is a classic example of white fragility. It deflects from the issue at hand, and makes the conversation more about her own feelings than about Joan’s. Many white people believe that white people are victims of discrimination, but this is more of a prevailing narrative (determined by white supremacy) than what most white people personally have experienced.



Despite its ubiquity, white superiority is often unnamed, as white people often deny race-based privileges. For example, the 2016 Oscars were challenged for their lack of diversity. Actor Helen Mirren responded that it “just so happened that way,” while actor Charlotte Rampling called the idea of a boycott of the Oscars “racist against whites.” Self-defense is a prominent position to protect white people, claiming that it is they who have been unfairly treated.

Again, white people rely on ideas of meritocracy (the idea that success is based on hard work) and objectivity (the false idea that white people can be without bias) to deflect from legitimate claims of discrimination. Rampling’s statement that boycotting the Oscars would be “racist against whites” not only misunderstands racism as systemic privilege that white people do not experience, but also ironically acknowledges the fact that the Oscars are dominated by white people.



When DiAngelo consults with organizations, she is often warned that past efforts to address a lack of diversity have resulted in “trauma” for white employees, and that DiAngelo should tread lightly and cautiously in her workshops. Of course, this so-called trauma has ensured that the organization has remained overwhelmingly white. Because the climate in the U.S. forbids the open expression of race-based feelings, white people become incomprehensible when talking about race.

The use of the word “trauma” is ironic, as it distorts the actual trauma that white people have perpetrated against people of color. The idea that having to take a workshop to address lack of diversity is a comparable trauma only emphasizes exactly how “fragile” white people can be, as in the book’s title.



Another example of white fragility in DiAngelo’s workshops came when she was co-facilitating an interracial group. One participant was upset at receiving feedback on how some of her statements impacted people of color in the room. After a break, her friends alerted DiAngelo that the woman was in poor health and thought she might have a heart attack. As a result, all the attention immediately focused on the white woman and away from her impact on the people of color.

This is a classic example of white fragility, as the woman’s inability to receive feedback becomes the room’s focus, rather than the racist behavior she perpetuated and how she might change that behavior going forward.



White fragility is a form of bullying, making it so unpleasant to confront white people that others will simply back off and give up. As such, it is a means of maintaining white supremacy. DiAngelo often asks people of color what it would mean for white people to simply receive feedback, reflect on it, and work to change the behavior. One man of color said, “it would be revolutionary.”

White fragility works in tandem with white supremacy, because it maintains the racial status quo. The man’s belief that receiving, reflecting, and working to change behavior would be “revolutionary” shows how addressing white fragility is a crucial first step in then being able to address white supremacy and racism on a systemic level.



CHAPTER 9

DiAngelo brings up several additional examples of white fragility, such as board presidents not liking the title of her workshop because it has the word “white” in it, white people getting defensive when coworkers ask for more diversity in hiring, or a white woman yelling at an event organizer of color because a talk during the event (which DiAngelo gave, not the organizer) didn’t address Native Americans specifically.

These examples of white fragility range from simple avoidance, like the board president unwilling to acknowledge a shared “white” identity, to projection and deflection. Here, the white woman is outraged over DiAngelo’s talk without realizing the impact of her yelling at a woman of color and without acknowledging her own complicity in white supremacy.



DiAngelo is in a position to give white people feedback on their unintentional racism. Because she is white, white people are more open to her message than they would be otherwise. They are often receptive to her presentation as long as it remains abstract. But when she names a racially problematic dynamic in the room, white fragility erupts among listeners.

White people readily acknowledge white supremacy in a theoretical way but react with white fragility when they have to acknowledge their own complicity in it, thus obscuring white people’s involvement in white supremacy.



In one of DiAngelo’s volunteer workshops, one white woman, Eva, stated that because she grew up in Germany (where she said there were no Black people) she was not racist. DiAngelo pushed back, explaining that Eva likely still absorbed messages from movies or impressions about African countries growing up, and that she had likely absorbed messages in the 23 years she lived in the U.S. Afterward, Eva approached DiAngelo, furious that DiAngelo made assumptions about her. Notably, DiAngelo did not tell Eva that she was racist. DiAngelo simply challenged Eva’s self-image as someone wholly exempt from racism, at a workshop that she volunteered to attend to deepen her understanding of racism.

This example shows how white people don’t only react with white fragility when people give feedback on problematic behavior, but also at the mere possibility that they could exhibit racist behavior or are not exempt from it, like Eva does. This illustrates the sheer degree of avoidance people have with being associated with racism.



Common feelings of white fragility include feeling angry, insulted, judged, attacked, guilty, or silenced. Common behaviors include crying, leaving the room or situation, withdrawing, arguing, or denying. Common responses include deflecting, saying that DiAngelo is generalizing, that they didn't mean any offense, that some other form of oppression is more important, or that their feelings are hurt. In one email DiAngelo received through a public website, a woman says that due to DiAngelo's age, there isn't anything DiAngelo could teach her about race, and that she has shed any racism she may have had through her relationships with Black people and that she lived through the civil rights movement. Many white people make similar claims rather than addressing their assumptions.

Claims of being free of racism, or of being a good person, or that it's unkind to point out racism, all serve to maintain white solidarity, close off self-reflection, make white people the victims, hijack the conversation, and protect a limited worldview. These behaviors do not present the person as racially open, but instead block any entry point for reflection and engagement. In short, the claims protect racist behavior.

CHAPTER 10

DiAngelo has discovered a set of unspoken rules for how to give white people feedback about racism. The first rule is not to give any feedback about racism under any circumstances. But if that rule must be broken, people must follow other rules: proper tone is crucial, there must be trust between the person giving feedback and the person receiving it, feedback must be given immediately and privately, and white people must feel completely safe and comfortable. The function of these rules is to obscure and deflect from racism and maintain white dominance.

When receiving feedback, DiAngelo tries to follow two guidelines: first, how, when, and where a person gives her feedback is irrelevant, and it's on her to build her racial stamina to accept it. The second guideline is to thank the person. These guidelines acknowledge that white people have blind spots and that they are responsible for interrupting racism; thus, they must be grateful when others help them achieve that goal.

White fragility is evident in the fact that white people need to build trust before they can explore racism in workshops so that others don't think they are racist. They don't want to be judged, they want people to assume they have good intentions, and they want to be respected. But once again, this prioritizes white people's feelings over those who feel the impact of racism.

This woman's belief that DiAngelo couldn't teach her anything about race (presumably because DiAngelo didn't live through the civil rights movement) illustrates again the belief that racism can only be perpetrated intentionally and by immoral people—anyone involved in the civil rights movement is free of racism under this statement. Again, these claims rest on faulty principals and only serve to deflect from racism rather than eradicate it.



While white fragility is a tactic white people use to try to prove that they are not racist, in reality it only paints white people as unaware and unopen. Rather than admit racism and work to change it, white people often react with white fragility, which ensures close-mindedness and white supremacy and racism's continuation because white people are unwilling to address problematic behavior.



This list of unspoken rules again emphasizes how sensitive white fragility makes white people. In all of these cases, it makes the feedback more about how the message is presented rather than what the message is, allowing white people to focus in on things like an angry tone or a public shaming as ways in which they are victimized, so that they don't have to address racist behavior.



This passage provides an alternative reaction to white fragility. DiAngelo understands that she may not be fully comfortable accepting feedback, but it is important not to focus on her own discomfort and instead to work to change her behavior.



This passage suggests that white people are more invested in not appearing racist than actively working to change any racist behavior they might exhibit—when the efforts should be the opposite.



White people raised in Western society are conditioned into a white supremacist worldview, and it is important to understand this so that white people can focus on how—not if—they perpetuate racism. And, DiAngelo adds, stopping racist patterns must be more important than convincing other people that they don't have them.

This passage returns to the idea that white supremacy is deeply ingrained in Western society, so no one is exempt from racism. Therefore, trying to convince others that white people have no racist behavior is pointless. The important thing is to acknowledge this behavior and work to change it.



CHAPTER 11

The term “white tears” refers to the way that white people (particularly white women) lament how hard racism is on *them*. When DiAngelo’s workplace called for an informal gathering following another police shooting of an unarmed Black man, a colleague of color told DiAngelo she was in no mood for white women’s tears. At the gathering, DiAngelo asked if any white participants felt moved to tears, they should leave the room. After the discussion, she spent the next hour explaining to an outraged white woman why she was asked not to cry.

This chapter explores “white women’s tears,” which are another manifestation of white fragility. As this passage hints, what seems like a natural emotional response or an expression of sympathy in reality comes off as a misdirection, pulling focus onto white women’s feelings and how racism impacts them.



While DiAngelo understands that emotions are naturally occurring, emotions can also be political. There is a long history of Black men being tortured and murdered because of white women’s distress. One example is Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy who reportedly flirted with a white woman, Carolyn Bryant, in a grocery store in Mississippi in 1955. She reported this alleged flirtation to her husband, and a few days later he and his half-brother beat Till to death, mutilated his body, and sank him in the Tallahatchie River. In 2007, Bryant admitted that she lied about Till flirting with her.

The book provides some historical context on how powerful white women’s tears are and continue to be—to the point where black men have been tortured and killed over white women’s tears. The fact that Bryant’s story was false only emphasizes how manipulative those tears can be.



Sometimes, white women cry because of feedback on their racism. In one of DiAngelo’s workshops, a white woman tries to explain her Black colleague’s feelings. When DiAngelo’s Black co-facilitator points out that speaking for the colleague is problematic—as it assumes that she, as a white woman, can speak best for a Black man—the woman begins to cry. As a result, all of the attention goes to her, while her Black colleague’s point is entirely lost in the discussion and he watches her receive comfort.

This episode illustrates how white women’s tears are a manifestation of white fragility. This white woman’s distress takes all of the focus off of productive discussions of racism and instead diverts everyone’s time and energy to taking care of the woman because she is crying.



In another example, a white woman new to a racial justice organization is promoted as the supervisor of the women of color who worked there for years and trained her. When the promotion is announced, the white woman tearfully requests support from the women of color, who have to deal with both the injustice of the promotion and having to comfort the woman they trained.

This is another example of white women’s tears as an instance of white fragility, as this white woman’s guilt put the focus back onto her instead of on the injustice experienced by the women of color in the organization, who were not given the same consideration for their feelings.



White fragility in men is also clear, but it usually shows up as varying forms of dominance, intimidation, and anger—pushing race off the table and helping them maintain control over the conversation. But to interrupt systemic racism, white people have to get racially uncomfortable and not indulge in anger, defensiveness, self-pity, or guilt—all of which push people to inaction rather than action. DiAngelo says that while she herself has been moved to tears in certain discussions, she tries to cry quietly and not accept comfort so that the focus can remain where it belongs.

White women’s tears also affect white men in distinct ways. White women have benefitted from increased resources through their relationships with white men. And so when white women cry and white men come to their rescue in cross-racial settings, they are legitimizing white women as the targets of harm, while people of color are abandoned. White people *do* need to feel grief about the brutality of white supremacy, DiAngelo writes, but it must lead to sustained and transformative actions.

CHAPTER 12

One day, DiAngelo meets with her company’s new web developer, Angela, who is Black. Angela gives DiAngelo a survey to fill out about her intended audience, methods, and goals. DiAngelo finds the questions tedious, and so she tries to explain verbally—the team goes into offices to facilitate antiracism training. She adds that the team isn’t always well-received, commenting that “the white people were scared by Deborah’s hair”—Deborah is a Black woman on DiAngelo’s team who wears her hair in locked braids.

A few days later, one of DiAngelo’s team members lets DiAngelo know that Angela was offended by DiAngelo’s comment. DiAngelo quickly realizes her comment was off and seeks out a white friend who has a solid understanding of cross-racial dynamics. They discuss her feelings of embarrassment, shame, and guilt, and identify the ways her racism was revealed. Afterwards, she asks Angela to meet again, and Angela accepts.

White men generally have different responses of white fragility than white women, but they serve the same purpose: to recenter themselves and take the focus off of racism. DiAngelo understands that there are instances in which crying is unavoidable, but white people should acknowledge the effect that those tears have and ensure that they do not pull focus from issues of race.



White women’s tears not only draw attention onto themselves, but also often force people of color to align with white women rather than addressing issues of racism. Instead of crying, white people should use their grief and discomfort to propel them into action, rather than to fall back into inaction.



White Fragility’s final chapter looks at an incident in which DiAngelo made an inappropriate comment and caused offense. She does this as a way to model appropriate responses and how other white people can avoid white fragility. Here, joking about her colleague’s hair is inappropriate because hair can be a sensitive issue for many Black women.



Even though DiAngelo feels guilt and shame at having caused offense, she works through those feelings with another white person first before asking to meet with Angela. That way, at the second meeting with Angela, DiAngelo can put her own feelings aside and focus on Angela instead. And she acknowledges the racism in her comment rather than acting defensively, illustrating how to avoid white fragility.



DiAngelo admits to Angela that her comment was inappropriate, and Angela agrees that she did not want to be joking about a Black woman's hair with a white woman she didn't know in a professional setting. DiAngelo asks if she missed anything else problematic in the meeting. Angela points out that she wrote the survey DiAngelo disregarded, and that she's spent her life justifying her intelligence to white people. DiAngelo acknowledges the impact of her dismissal and asks if there's anything else Angela needs. Angela asks if DiAngelo wants feedback publicly or privately next time, and DiAngelo says publicly because she is an educator and she wants to model how to receive feedback openly. Angela appreciates DiAngelo's willingness to repair her mistakes.

DiAngelo acknowledges that this interaction would not have been as constructive before she began her work as an educator—back then, she likely would have reacted with defensiveness. But instead, when receiving feedback, it is important to respond with discomfort, but also gratitude, compassion, humility, and motivation. That way white people can reflect, apologize, engage, and seek more understanding. When people's understanding of racism is transformed, then their responses to it can be transformed as well.

It is important to form new ideas about racism, which DiAngelo lists. For instance, being good or bad is not relevant to racism, white people have blind spots and implicit bias, and feedback is a sign of trust given by people of color because it is difficult to give. She also notes that discomfort is key to growth, and action is the remedy for guilt. Racism hurts (and even kills) people of color, and so interrupting it is more important than white people's self-image or feelings. These new ideas will minimize defensiveness, allow for growth and action, build authentic relationships and trust, and interrupt internalized superiority and privilege. When white people ask DiAngelo what to do about racism and white fragility, she asks what's enabled them to be ignorant about racism up to this point. They have to educate themselves, build relationships, and help to change institutions.

Returning to the example with Angela, DiAngelo followed a series of steps. She processed her reaction with another white person as to not burden people of color. She then identified how she reinforced racism. Afterward, she asked if Angela would be willing to meet and own her racism. DiAngelo didn't say "if you were offended," she admitted her behavior was offensive, and she asked Angela what she missed and committed to do better. And now, DiAngelo and Angela have more mutual trust, not less.

The steps DiAngelo goes through model how to combat white fragility. She takes responsibility for the impact of her comment, regardless of her intention. She does the same thing in the moment when Angela calls her out on her disregard for the survey that Angela wrote. DiAngelo expresses her desire to take feedback in public so that she, too, can work on fighting her own white fragility and also provide an example for the other white people around her. And as such, Angela appreciates her ability to graciously receive the feedback, reflect, and work to change her behavior—like the man at the end of Chapter 9 expresses.



DiAngelo admits that reacting with white fragility is second nature even for herself, because before she began her work, she also would have exhibited it. She hopes that by bringing more awareness to these patterns of reactions that other people can also combat their reactions and move past white fragility.



This passage returns to the key themes of the book: that it is important for white people to assess themselves as a collective, and how they have benefitted from white supremacy. It is important for white people to understand racism as a system, not only as intentional actions that extreme people carry out. And by admitting these two things, white people can hopefully address some of their own complicity in racism and white supremacy and work to change it. Part of that project includes education on the issues, not just through this book but through other resources on racism. And after combatting white fragility, they can hopefully then move on to helping dismantle racism on an institutional level.



Not saying the phrase "if you were offended" is a key part of admitting racism, because it recognizes the impact of racist comments rather than viewing offense through white people's lenses. And as a result of this and the other steps that DiAngelo took, she was able to repair the relationship and forge a better one with Angela—again showing the positive impact that not reacting with white fragility can have.



White people must educate themselves and demand that schools and universities educate students about race; they can also get involved in multi-racial organizations and white organizations working for racial justice. White people have to welcome feedback—not being open to it makes relationships with people of color distant and inauthentic. And most importantly, it is necessary for white people to break the silence about race and racism with other white people.

DiAngelo addresses criticism that her work takes advantage of white guilt: she doesn't see her efforts to acknowledge how race shapes her life as a matter of guilt. She doesn't feel guilty about racism—she didn't choose her socialization. But she is responsible for her role in it. Knowing that racism is ingrained in society, she doesn't feel that she needs to invest energy in denying that she can be racist. Instead, she is glad to be able to identify when she makes mistakes so that she can stop colluding in the system.

One approach to antiracist work is to develop a positive white identity by reclaiming cultural heritage that was lost during assimilation. But a positive white identity is an impossible goal, as white identity is inherently racist and in collusion with white supremacy. To claim only to be Italian or Irish is to ignore racism today. Rather, white people can strive to be less racially oppressive instead, to break with white silence and white solidarity.

Many white participants in DiAngelo's workshops ask her how to tell someone about their racism without triggering white fragility. She asks in turn how she could tell *them* about their racism without triggering it, to point out that they are part of the problem, too. Still, DiAngelo has a few strategies: first, trying to understand the person's perspective before sharing hers, and framing her feedback or perspective in a way where she is sharing insight she has gained. She also takes some time and returns to interactions later. But she emphasizes that her goal is not to change the other person—what guides her is her own need for integrity and to break with white solidarity.

People of color also ask DiAngelo how to navigate white fragility. She wishes she had a simple answer, but ultimately she suggests that if they don't want to burden themselves, they can ask a white person they trust to deal with the situation. It is also white people's responsibility to be less fragile, and people of color should avoid making white people feel more comfortable because it protects white people's feelings rather than supporting growth. People of color should not avoid sharing their pain and challenging racism simply because white people can't handle it.

Education and changed behavior don't simply stop at apologizing for racist behavior or remarks. It extends to breaking with white supremacy in all its forms, both in the company of white people and also in institutions at large. Still, the first step to doing this is overcoming white fragility, because white people need to be able to talk about racial issues in the first place before dismantling them.



White people may feel discomfort in being called out for racist behavior. However, understanding that white people are inevitably complicit in racism generally makes accusations of racism less stressful, and from there people can work more productively to change the behavior that reinforces that racism.



People claiming that they are only Irish or Italian again ignores the collective advantages that white people have in society, and it ignores the racist systems from which they benefit as a group. This idea returns to the argument of individualism—that individual white people might be exempt from racism because of their unique perspective.



While it is important to learn how to hold other white people accountable for racist behavior, it's not enough to look for this in other people—white people must also keep themselves accountable and be willing to receive feedback. In addition, they must call out racism for themselves to act with integrity and break with white solidarity and white supremacy.



Although people of color are not DiAngelo's target audience for this book, she also emphasizes that they need to hold white people accountable as well and not to allow white people to fall back on white fragility and defensiveness over race. Instead, white people must manage their discomfort constructively and want to change their behavior.



In conclusion, society and its institutions currently maintain racial inequality. For this system to continue only needs white people to be really nice and continue to act the same ways that they always have. Interrupting racism takes courage and intentionality. It is a lifelong process, but ultimately one that is necessary to align with professed values.

The current status quo only perpetuates racism and white supremacy. To break with that status quo, it is necessary for white people to challenge their assumptions on race and work to change the behavior based on these assumptions.





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