

## Chapter 4—How Does Race Shape The Lives Of White People?

### Summary Points

Underlying foundation of white fragility: How being white shapes our perspectives, experiences, and responses.

#### *Belonging*

We belong racially.

#### *Freedom From The Burden Of Race*

Because I haven't been socialized to see myself or to be seen by other whites in racial terms, I don't carry the psychic weight of race; I don't have to worry about how others feel about it 54.

Whiteness has psychological advantages that translate into material terms 54.

#### *Just People*

Whiteness is the norm for humanity; whites are “just people.”

#### *White Solidarity*

White solidarity is the unspoken agreement among whites to protect white advantage and not cause another white person to feel racial discomfort by confronting them when they say or do something racially problematic. 57

#### *White Racial Innocence*

Because we are not raised to see ourselves in racial terms or to see white space as racialized space, we position ourselves as innocent of race. 62

If white people see themselves as racially innocent it means that we then think we need it explained to us by those who are not racially innocent; “Because people of color are not seen as racially innocent, they are expected to speak to issues of race (but must do so on white terms)...They—not we—have race, and thus they are the holders of racial knowledge.” 62

For those of us who work to raise the racial consciousness of whites, simply getting whites to acknowledge that our race gives us advantages is a major effort. The defensiveness, denial, and resistance are deep. But acknowledging advantage is only a first step, and this acknowledgment can be used in a way that renders it meaningless and allows us white people to exempt ourselves from further responsibility. 63.

White privilege is not innocent; racism must be actively and passively, consciously and unconsciously, maintained.

Having people of color teach white people about racism reinforces several racial assumptions

- It implies that racism is something that happens to people of color and has nothing to do with us and thus cannot be expected to have any knowledge of it.
- Denies that racism is a relationship in which both groups are involved.
- This request requires nothing of us and reinforces unequal power relations by asking people of color to do our work.
- Third, it ignores the historical dimensions of racereactions.

“Now it is our responsibility to grapple with how this socialization manifests itself in our daily lives and how it shapes our responses when it is challenged.” 69

## Reflection Questions

### *Belonging*

1. what do we say to people of color who come into our churches—our surely *white* churches—and do not belong?

### *Freedom Of Movement*

2. Consider the story DiAngelo tells on p. 55 about the workshop she led with Deborah. There was no issue with DiAngelo going to Lake Coeur d’Alene in Idaho; she never thought twice about it. Why? As you go about your day, week, month, etc. pay attention the spaces you occupy. Do you belong there? Must you consider what your race *means* where you are at? If this question makes no real sense to you, is that in itself problematic? If you can, think of the places that you have been personally, or places that you can think of where your race would close that place off to you. And think about what racial groups would be there that would make you feel that way.

Again, if you cannot answer this question, you are proving DiAngelo's point.

3. How often do you refer to people of color as specified by their color; how often is your friend referred to as your "black friend." How does being white make this possible? Why are they simply not your "friend." Moreover, think of the manner in which we refer to church. Assuming this following assumption to be true, why is your church simply "church," and other churches are "black church," or "Asian church?" Why is the theological work done by white people referred to as "liberation theology?" Why was/are James Cone, Willie Jennings, and Kameron Carter considered "black theologians?" In a similar vein, to highlight the way this works, why are women who do theology/philosophy considered "feminine theorists?" Why are people who do not follow the traditional binary structure of sexual relationships considered homosexual?

### *White Solidarity*

4. DiAngelo articulates a scene in which a dinner party is ruined because someone interjects a racist comment that was given by Uncle Bob; white solidarity was broken. She then makes this comment: "Why speaking up about racism would ruin the ambiance or threaten our career advancement is something we might want to talk about" 58. She is right. So talk about it!
5. Jesus said that whoever feeds the least has fed Christ directly (Mt 25: 34-40). Analogically, does this apply to breaking white solidarity in favor of people of color?

### *The Good Old Days*

6. Can *Christians* ever think that America has ever been great? *Who* was it great for? Where do we, as Christians, derive the meaning of the word "great" from? Consider Romans

8:28–30. Reflect on the meaning of greatness in this short section. “Greatness,” or “goodness,” is being formed to the image of Christ. How was the nation’s foundation—one that was, as you will remember, justified by Jefferson’s *SUGGESTION*—ever declared good, that is, conformed to the image of Christ?

*White Racial Innocence*

7. Is white segregation racially innocent? How might it not be?

8. Talk about what white racial innocence makes possible in judges that DiAngelo highlights on pg. 63.

### *Segregated Lives*

9. “The most profound message of racial segregation may be that the absence of people of color from our lives is no real loss. Not one person who loved me, guided me, or taught me ever conveyed that segregation deprived me of anything of value” (67). How true is this for you?

### Recurring Questions

1. How has your understanding of whiteness progressed?
2. How do you sense God is calling you to respond?
3. What are your lingering fragile responses and why?
4. Are you sure you understand the Cross?

### Travis' Thoughts

This is the reality: we may not have been the actual ones who directly carried out racism in the individual ways that DiAngelo has

been trying to highlight. But it is certainly the case that “the very context in which I entered the world was organized hierarchically by race” 52. We have inherited what Peggy McIntosh calls, “the invisible package of unearned benefits.”

Food For Thought: Jesus was not white!

## Homework

1. Go to a church of color for at least a month consecutively (once COVID is over)—even if that means you have to travel a good distance to do so. The goal is to put yourself in a place where your whiteness is obvious in a way that forces you to see areas of life where you belong. This is ultimately to show you how race *works*, and who it works *for*.
2. Consider any period in the past from the perspective of people of color: 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; sharecropping; Chinese exclusion laws; Japanese American internment; Jim Crow laws of mandatory segregation; black codes; bans on black jury service; bans on voting; imprisoning people for unpaid work; medical sterilization and experimentation; employment discrimination; educational discrimination; inferior schools; biased laws and policing practices; redlining and subprime mortgages; mass incarceration; racist media representations; cultural erasures, attacks, and mockery; and untold and



perverted historical accounts. Reflect on: was America ever great for these people?

3. Pause for a moment and consider the profundity of this message: we are taught that we lose nothing of value through racial segregation. Consider the message we send to our children—as well as to children of color—when we describe white segregation as good. 68
4. Our socialization engenders a common set of racial patterns—the foundation of white fragility. Below you find the patterns that found white fragility. Think through and select all that apply to you in both objective and subjective ways. What this should look like, if everyone has understood DiAngelo’s work well, is that every person should have a completely filled out list objectively, and then another subjective list that is their own personal experience. Why is it the case that everyone should have a completely filled out objective list (think about how racism and whiteness works)? This exercise is meant to provoke. What you experience in this exercise means something; it is not benign. If you are annoyed, angry, distressed, etc., *its for a reason*. Again, you are proving DiAngelo’s work.

	Objective	Subjective
Preference for racial segregation, and a lack of sense of loss about segregation		
Lack of understanding about what racism is		

Seeing ourselves as individuals, exempt from the forces of racial socialization		
Failure to understand that we bring our group's history with us, that history matters		
Assuming everyone is having or can have our experience		
Lack of racial humility		
Dismissing what we don't understand		
Lack of authentic interest in the perspective of people of color		
Wanting to jump over the hard, personal work and get to solutions		
Confusing disagreement with not understanding		
Need to maintain white solidarity, to save face, to look good		
Guilt that paralyzes		

or allows inaction		
Defensiveness about any suggestion that we are connected to racism		
A focus on intentions over impact		