

## Chapter 2—Racism and White Fragility

### Summary Points

Race is socially constructed; it is not biologically determinative. Under the skin, there is no true biological race. Race and biology was driven by social and economic investments; it was essentially a creation.

#### *Social Construction of Race in the United States*

Noble ideology of equality and the reality of genocide had to be reconciled. It was Jefferson who *SUGGESTED* that there may be natural differences amongst the races. The questions were never “are blacks inferior,” but rather, “Why are blacks inferior?” (Reference for question #1)

#### *The Perception of Race*

The term “white” DID NOT EXIST BEFORE THE LATE 1600S! This means that whiteness *means* something. From the beginning, “white” people developed a system that endorsed, justified and sustained their projects. This is true! This is not fictional, as if there is some sort of ontological realness to whiteness. We catted Africans for “salvific” purposes—to give them a “better” life. This creation of ours was so successful that it blinded us to what is going on; we had to be convinced that black people were human because of Jefferson’ suggestion; a *suggestion!* And now, because of our ignorance of what whiteness means, we call upon the very people we ravished to explain how it all works... is this making sense??? How is it fair for us to ask black people (and other nonwhite people) to explain racism to *us*? How painful must it be for black people to

have to explain to us why *our* creation has been so successful that we are blinded to its success; we obtained a comfort level that allowed the space for us to no longer have to worry about race. But at *whose* expense? (Reference for question #2)

It was white people—people who were already seen as white—who made the call to allow others races to be perceived as white.

### *Racism*

Understanding racism takes understanding prejudice and discrimination

- o Prejudice: pre-judgement about another person based on the social groups to which that person belongs. All humans have prejudice; those who claim to lack prejudice are demonstrating a profound lack of self-awareness.
- o Discrimination: is action based on prejudice.

David Wellman's definition of racism is helpful: a system of *advantage* based on race.

White Privilege: a sociological concept referring to advantages that are taken for granted by whites and that cannot be similarly enjoyed by people of color in the same context. Just think: do you have reason to fear for your life when a cop car is behind you? Another way that this could be seen is to think about whether or not, as a male, you worry about being sexually assaulted when walking to your car at night?

### *Whiteness as a Position of Status*

Whiteness can be thought of as all the aspects of being white.

Whiteness rests upon a foundational premise: the definition of whites as the norm or standard for humans, and people of color as a deviation from that norm.

### *White Supremacy*

Race scholars use the term white supremacy to describe a sociopolitical economic system of domination based on racial categories that benefits those defined and perceived as white. This system of structural power privileges, centralizes, and elevates white people as a group. 30

Naming white supremacy changes the conversation in two key ways.

- o It makes the system visible and shifts the locus of change onto white people, where it belongs.
- o It also points us in the direction of the lifelong work that is uniquely ours, challenging our complicity with and investment in racism.

### *The White Racial Frame*

WRF: how whites circulate and reinforce racial messages that position whites as superior

- o Most general level: views whites as superior and views people of color as less
- o Next level of framing: because social institutions are controlled by whites, white dominance is unremarkable and taken for granted.
- o Deepest level: negative stereotypes and images of racial others as inferior are reinforced

## Reflection Questions

1. What kind of community does it take to make these kinds of moves possible? In other words, what kind of person do you have to be to make the kind of suggestion that Jefferson did? (Please refer to 2nd paragraph in summary points)
  
2. Perception on Whiteness
  - a. Reactions towards 'whiteness' being created
  
  - b. Do you think it is problematic that we rely on people of color to explain racism? Moreover, why do we find it necessary that they do so in a "white" way?
  
3. Is there something special about whiteness that God finds favor in?

4. What does DiAngelo's description of racism do to our theology? Does whiteness affect our theology? Think of the "birdcage" metaphor she calls upon 23. Could it be the case that whiteness has determined the manner in which we do theology as if we were looking in the birdcage from up close? To see this, just think: Why do we feel the need to qualify "liberation" theology, or "feminist" theology.

### *Whiteness as a Position of Status*

5. Why do we call white churches simple church, but black or Asian churches we add the qualifier? Moreover, why do we feel the need—at least I can testify to this—to qualify our nonwhite friends in conversations; Jackie Robinson was a "black" baseball player rather than simply a baseball player.

6. Have you ever thought that you were "just human?"

### Recurring Questions

7. How has your understanding of whiteness progressed?
8. How do you sense God is calling you to respond?
9. What are your lingering fragile responses and why?
10. Are you sure you understand the Cross?

## Travis' Thoughts

There is such a thing as the white external experience. There are actual advantages. If you think that there are *not* advantages to be perceived as white, you only prove the point. Not having to think about race is a *privilege*.

## Homework

Look back to last week's homework. Identify what elements are essential to be Christian, what elements of your service have assimilated to white culture, and where there is intersection, so that you can identify what is essential to being Christian and how whiteness has integrated itself into our everyday church structures.

