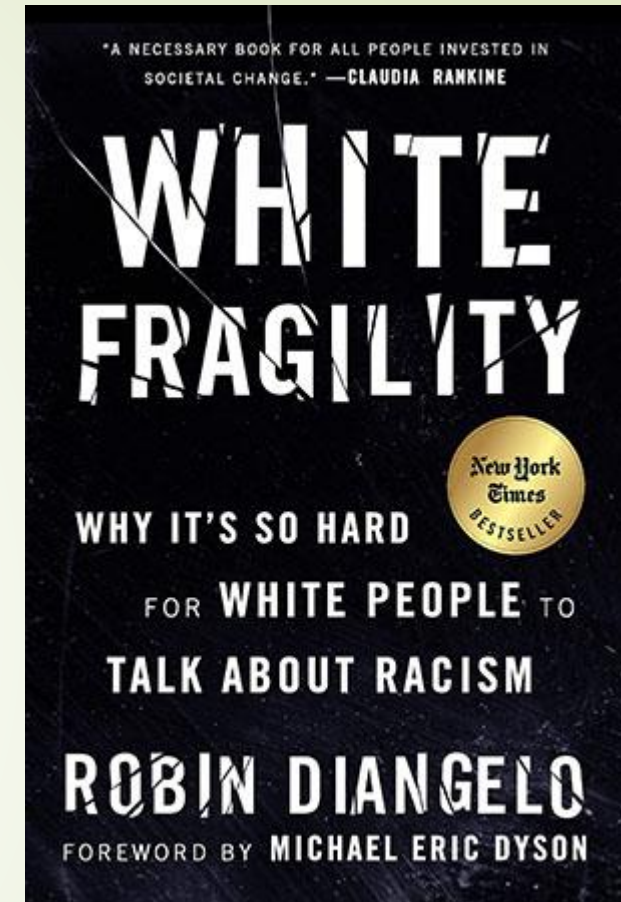


Book Discussion

*White Fragility: Why It's So
Hard for White People to
Talk About Racism*

by Robin DiAngelo

Chapters 8-9 (after looking at Bourdieu in 7,
for Kate!)





Agenda

- Present Discussion Considerations & Guidelines
- Assign Group Roles
 - Time-Keeper
 - Focus-Keeper
 - Assign Facilitator for Next Discussion (chs. 10 & 11)
- Discuss Chapters 8 & 9

Discussion Considerations - Review

- A strong opinion is not the same as informed knowledge.
- “I don’t agree” may actually mean “I don’t understand.”
- We have a deep interest in denying the forms of oppression that benefit us....
 - However, regardless of the reason, this denial still benefits whites at the group level, not people of color.
- Racism goes beyond individual intentions to collective group patterns.
- We don’t have to be aware of racism for it to exist.
- Our racial position (whether we identify as white, a person of color, or multiracial) will greatly affect our ability to see racism.
 - For example, if we swim against the “current” of racial privilege, it’s often easier to recognize, while it’s harder to recognize if we swim with the current.
- Putting our effort into protecting rather than expanding our current worldview prevents our intellectual and emotional growth.



Discussion Questions – Chapter 7 Bourdieu

RACIAL TRIGGERS FOR WHITE PEOPLE

- Anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu talks of *field* (our social context), *capital* (our power/status) and *habitus* (our perception of our place in the order of things based on field and capital) pp.102-3
- In the list of fragility-inducing challenges on pp.103-4, how might each be described as a challenge to field, capital and/or habitus?



Discussion Questions – Chapter 8

THE RESULT: WHITE FRAGILITY

- Question 1
- What are some ways that white people use to shut down talk of race when it becomes uncomfortable for them?



Discussion Questions – Chapter 8

THE RESULT: WHITE FRAGILITY

- Question 2
- The author claims that white fragility functions as a form of bullying. How so?



Discussion Questions – Chapter 8

THE RESULT: WHITE FRAGILITY

- Question 3 “White equilibrium is a cocoon of racial comfort, centrality, superiority, entitlement, racial apathy, and obliviousness, all rooted in an identity of being good people free of racism.” p. 112
- What would a healthier equilibrium look like? How can we get to a place where the ‘revolutionary’ idea of being open to feedback from people of color is the norm?



Discussion Questions – Chapter 9

WHITE FRAGILITY IN ACTION

- Question 1
- The chapter begins with five stories illustrating white fragility in action. What makes each of these stories an example of white fragility? What strategy was (unconsciously?) employed to avoid further discomfort for white people?



Discussion Questions – Chapter 9

WHITE FRAGILITY IN ACTION

- Question 2
- Why are white people more receptive to other white people (rather than people of color) educating them on race? What does this say about the role white people must play in addressing systemic racism in society broadly and specifically in our homes, with our friends and family members, and in our workplaces with our colleagues?



Discussion Questions – Chapter 9

WHITE FRAGILITY IN ACTION

- Question 3
- Page 121 lists a series of problematic assumptions about racism and ourselves. In light of our reading, what's problematic about them?

Additional Thoughts

- See this website for additional resources:
 - <https://www.robindiangelo.com/resources/>
 - Specifically:
 - [Anti-Racist Handout](#)
 - [Blaming Trump is too easy - this is us](#)
- Additional reading:
 - Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America by Ibram X. Kendi
 - This is a long, detailed book, however There's also a shorter version for teens, but maybe more accessible to people to get a sense of whether they want to go deeper: Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You: A Remix of the National Book Award winning Stamped from the Beginning, by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi
 - The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America by Richard Rothstein



Next Week

- Discuss Chapters 10 & 11
- Who will lead?



Notes from Previous Sessions

- **Considerations for this discussion**
- **Discussion questions for previous chapters**

Discussion Considerations *(Full List)*

- A strong opinion is not the same as informed knowledge.
- There is a difference between *agreement* and *understanding*. When discussing complex social and institutional dynamics such as racism, consider whether “I don’t agree” may actually mean “I don’t understand.”
- We have a deep interest in denying the forms of oppression that benefit us. We may also have an interest in denying forms of oppression that harm us. For example, people of color can deny the existence of racism and even support its structures. This denial may keep them from feeling overwhelmed by the daily slights or protect them from the penalties of confronting white people on racism. However, regardless of the reason, this denial still benefits whites at the group level, not people of color.
- Racism goes beyond individual intentions to collective group patterns.
- We don’t have to be aware of racism in order for it to exist.
- Our racial position (whether we identify as white, a person of color, or multiracial) will greatly affect our ability to see racism. For example, if we swim against the “current” of racial privilege, it’s often easier to recognize, while it’s harder to recognize if we swim with the current.
- Putting our effort into protecting rather than expanding our current worldview prevents our intellectual and emotional growth.

Chapter 1 Discussion Questions

- Identify a passage from chapter 1 that invokes any sense of discomfort. Highlight this passage and return to reading it periodically as you work through the book. What does this passage reveal about your socialization into the white racial frame? Does your discomfort shift over time? If so, what supported that shift?
- If you are working through these questions as part of a white discussion group, how will you keep the discussion on track (focused on *ourselves* and our *own* participation)? How will you ensure that when common white patterns surface (distancing, intellectualizing, rationalizing), you will work to identify and challenge them rather than ignore or avoid them?
- How do so many white people feel so confident in their opinions on racism, even as they live their lives in segregation?
- How can we make generalizations about what it means to be white when we don't know each person's individual story?
- What are some constructive ways to use your emotional reactions when your opinions on racism are challenged?
- Explain in your own words the author's critique of the ideology of individualism.



Discussion Questions - Chapter 2

RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY

- How do you define these terms?
 - Prejudice
 - Discrimination
 - Racism
- What is problematic about the idea of the U.S. as a great “melting pot”?
- How did the melting pot actually work?
- What are some ways in which racism is “deeply embedded in the fabric” of society?
 - Provide some examples.
- Explain the concept of the **white racial frame**. What are some examples?

According to the author:

➤ Prejudice

(page 19)

- “**pre-judgement** about another person based on the social groups to which that person belongs...
 - Consists of thoughts and feelings, including stereotypes, attitudes, and generalizations that are based on little or no experience
 - And then are projected onto everyone from that group.”

➤ Discrimination

(page 20)

- “**action** based on prejudice ... including ignoring, exclusion, threats, ridicule, slander and violence.”

➤ Racism

(page 20)

- “When a racial group’s collective prejudice is **backed by the power of legal authority and institutional control**, it is transformed into racism...
 - A far reaching system that functions independently from intentions or self-images of individual actors.”
- David Wellman: “a system of advantage based on race”

(page 24)



Discussion Questions - Chapter 3

RACISM AFTER THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

- What is Color-blind racism?
 - Give examples
 - Why is it problematic?
- What is Aversive Racism?
 - Give examples
 - Why is it problematic?
- What is Cultural Racism?
 - Give examples
 - Why is it problematic?
- Why does the author consider young white people today to be no less racist than white people in the past?

Discussion Questions - Chapter 4

HOW DOES RACE SHAPE THE LIVES OF WHITE PEOPLE?

- Identify at least three ways that white racial **belonging** has been conveyed to you in the last week
- Which of the other things that white people enjoy was a surprise for you to think about and why?
 - Freedom of the burden of race
 - Freedom of movement
 - Just “people”
 - White solidarity
 - Good old days
 - White racial innocence
 - Segregated lives
 - Belonging (*already discussed*)
- In what settings have you experienced the expectation of **white solidarity/racial silence**?
 - How has that expectation been communicated to you?
 - How have you responded?
 - What consequences have you faced or fear you will face by breaking with white solidarity?

Chapter 5

THE GOOD/BAD BINARY

If this is the paradigm...

RACIST	Not RACIST
Bigoted	Progressive
Ignorant	Educated
Prejudiced	Open-minded
Mean	Well-intentioned
Old	Young
Southern	Northern
BAD	GOOD

Then, of course, we are not racist...

Right?

Discussion Questions - Chapter 5

THE GOOD/BAD BINARY

- The author suggests that one of the most effective barriers to talking about racism with white people is the good/bad binary.
 - How have you seen this binary underlying common white responses to charges of racism (yours or others)?
 - How might you respond when the binary surfaces in discussions about racism?
- Give other examples that you have heard yourself or others saying that you or they are:
 - Color-Blind
 - “I was taught to treat everyone the same”
 - “Focusing on race is what divides us”
 - Color-Celebrate
 - “I work in a diverse environment”
 - “Someone in my family married a person of color”
- What are good responses when we hear ourselves or others making these kinds of statements?
- If you are white, when was the last time someone challenged you to look at an aspect of yourself related to racism?
 - How did you feel?
 - How did you respond?
 - What insights did/can you gain from the exchange?
- If no one has ever challenged you (or not in a very long time), what might that tell you about how whiteness shapes your life?



Discussion Questions – Chapter 6

ANTI-BLACKNESS

- What does it mean to say that anti-blackness is present across all communities of color; even within black communities?
- What does the author mean when she suggests that causing pain and suffering for black people rests on a sense of white righteousness?
- Why haven't affirmative action programs changed our racial outcomes?



Discussion Questions – Chapter 7

RACIAL TRIGGERS FOR WHITE PEOPLE

- Identify a trigger listed in this chapter and share an example you have experienced in your own life.
- The author shares the story of Mr. Roberts and lists the ways that the two teachers in the story dismissed what they did not understand. Discuss this example. How have you seen or participated in these forms of dismissal?
- Discuss Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as a means of understanding the racial disequilibrium that leads to white fragility. In what ways is this concept helpful in explaining how racial disequilibrium works?