

White Fragility

Book Discussion Questions

1. DiAngelo critiques the common definition of racism as *bad things done by bad people to hurt others because of race*. What is her definition of racism, and why is this important for **our** learning?

2. DiAngelo asks us to put aside our own personal *uniqueness*, our own personal narratives. Focusing on our *uniqueness* often highlights all the reasons why we think we personally have no work to do on unpacking privilege and racism. ("*I grew up poor so I know what it's like...*," "*My parents taught me to always...*," etc.)

- Instead, she wants white readers to consider how whiteness has played a role in our own experiences and opportunities. Anyone want to share?

3. According to DiAngelo, why was it "necessary" in the U.S. to invent and define who was white and who was Black / non-white?

- Did it surprise you to read about white ethnic groups who were not always thought of in the U.S. to be white? Who got to decide who was white?
- Were any of your white U.S. ancestors considered to be non-white? Were times tough for your immigrant ancestors? If so, in what ways does DiAngelo say this is still **not** the same as being Black in the U.S.?
- If you are an immigrant, do you think your race hindered or helped your immigration case, or had no impact at all? In what ways?

4. On white supremacy, DiAngelo writes that we are used to thinking of white supremacy solely in terms of violent racists and hate crimes. She argues that this keeps whites from examining and addressing our own involvement in racist systems.

- What is the relationship between silence (or declaring ourselves exempt from responsibility) and power, control, and white supremacy / domination?
- An uncomfortable question for us to think about: We hear a lot about "Iowa nice." Do we benefit from keeping silent? What do we gain or lose in declaring ourselves exempt?

5. In Chapter 3, DiAngelo discusses three types of "new" racism among whites:

- Color blind racism: "I don't see race; I don't see you as black! In fact, it's racist to be talking about race!"
- Aversive racism: "Our workplace is virtually all white because people of color just don't apply! They would rather be someplace more urban."
- Cultural racism: "We're supposed to be post-racial now, yet discrimination against whites is *just* as bad as discrimination against Blacks. By the way, did you see they just hired a new staff member *from Chicago*? Wonder how *he* got hired..."

Were any of these types familiar to you? Anyone want to share?

5. In Chapter 4, DiAngelo lists a number of ways that being white shapes the perspectives, experiences, and responses of white people in the U.S. What are your thoughts on these?

6. DiAngelo presents a litany of statements that fall into two categories that she terms Color-blind and Color-celebrate. What do those categories mean? Why are statements (such as examples below) problematic?

- "I was taught to treat everyone the same. I don't care if you're pink, purple, or polka-dotted. I don't see color!"
- "I don't have race privilege because... [I was picked on for being white / growing up poor / fill in the blank]"
- "Racism is not my problem because... [I have people of color in my family / I grew up in California / I lived in Japan and was a minority there / fill in the blank]"
- "I don't necessarily like how white my neighborhood / community is but I had to move there... [for the schools / for the safety / fill in the blank]"

7. Moving beyond the Good / Bad binary is a central concept in *White Fragility*. She states that thinking of racism only in extreme binary terms of *bad things done by bad people* renders invisible or excuses the countless daily occurrences perpetuated by well-meaning people who *didn't intend*, or *certainly knew better but*, or *were taken out of context*, and so on. Moving beyond the Good / Bad binary, what recent examples of racism can we identify?

8. In Chapter 6, DiAngelo writes about Affirmative Action and that there are a number of misperceptions and myths about how, when, and if people of color are recruited and hired into organizations. Let's consider our own campus.

- Have we witnessed or overheard attitudes similar to what DiAngelo describes?
- What steps can we take to make improvements?
- If an organization onboards and mentors people of color "just like everyone else," what does that really mean in a predominantly white institution?

9. Crucial Conversations tie-in: The next time you hear statements such as those presented in the Question 1 List and in question 2, how might you respond?

Adapted from Iowa State University White Fragility: Book Discussion Series