

I'd like to scratch the surface and talk a little about white fragility. I got interested in this when I first tried to listen to *The New Jim Crow* on Audible. I found myself thinking "Why am I reading this? We have elected a black president twice." So I stopped. I picked the book up again a year later and realized how small and narrow I had been. Once again, I learned that I have so much to learn.

Let's start with some words by Robin DeAngelo, author of *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*.

In defining "white fragility," deAngelo says, "White people in North America live in a society that is deeply separate and unequal by race, and white people are the beneficiaries of that separation and inequality. As a result, we are insulated from racial stress, at the same time that we come to feel entitled to and deserving of our advantage. Given how seldom we experience racial discomfort in a society we

dominate, we haven't had to build our racial stamina. Socialized in 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. Though white fragility is triggered by discomfort and anxiety, it is born of superiority

and entitlement. White fragility is not weakness per se. In fact, it is a powerful means of white racial control and the protection of the white advantage. “

So, what can we take from this long definition? White people don't see themselves in racial terms. We have a white frame of reference, a white worldview, and move through the world with a white experience. Those “other people” have racial identities--not me--not us. We have been socially conditioned since birth. Our first challenge: name our race. Within the social construct of race, let's just admit our race is white.

Our second challenge: Let's acknowledge racism isn't restricted to bad people--although it's true that some people behave very badly. In the post-civil rights era, we were taught that racists are immoral, mean people who do bad things to other people. But in fact, as Tom has just said, we are **all** involved in systemic and institutional racism. It's not

necessarily intentional, but we are an integral part of a racist society. Therefore, we are all racist.

Racism isn't just about understanding how it is to be black, or brown, or indigenous in a world dominated by white people. Racism is about understanding white supremacy—our own white supremacy.

Our primary goals as white people should be to recognize how the system of racism shapes our lives, how we uphold that system, and finally, how we might interrupt it.

We aren't going to interrupt it by acknowledging how lucky we are to be white. Or by noting Barack O'Bama was elected twice. Or by saying we have a black daughter-in-law or black friends, or by being outraged because yet another black person has been needlessly killed, or by crying at our own insensitivities and the general injustice--and stealing the

spotlight with our tears. Poor me, I'm a white woman who feels bad. And we aren't going to interrupt this system of racism by sending a donation to the Southern Poverty Law Center or the ACLU or the NAACP—although those are not bad ideas.

We aren't too old to act, or too removed to act--or too anything. We are just human. We are ALL just human, all with a variety of experiences, each one as unique and important as the next. This is the very essence of all seven of our UU principles. This is the very essence of the do unto others as you would have them do unto you belief most of the world would say it embraces. Do we embrace these as our principles, our supposed values? Do we really?

We are white North Americans living in a continent that has been developing racism over four hundred years and has entrenched it solidly. As an example, DeAngelo poses: "The United States was founded on the principle that all people

are created equal. Yet the nation began with the attempted genocide of Indigenous people and the theft of their land. American wealth was built on the labor of kidnapped and enslaved Africans and their descendants. Women were denied the right to vote until 1920, and black women were denied to that right until 1964 [44 years later]. We have yet to achieve our founding principal.” Canada, Mexico, other places, have similar experiences. How many times do we say or hear, “It’s Mexico,” or “It’s just Mexico?” I’ve said it. How superior is that?

We have seen the outrage when Colin Kapernik silently and gracefully took a knee during the national anthem. His career was ruined for speaking truth. We have seen people murdered—again and again. We all know the unfairness of the criminal justice, educational, health, and economic systems in our states, our countries, our world. And we all know who suffers the most, over and over and over.

We also know what we have to do now. If we aren't a part of the solution, we are choosing to remain a part of the problem. And we are denying all of our UU principles.

If we truly want to interrupt this system of racism, we will need to be extremely mindful and to actually change our own assumptions, attitudes and behaviors. It will not help to feel guilty about being white or being fragile and apologetic or defensive. Being born as each of us were wasn't a choice we made-- it just is what it is. But it doesn't have to remain being what it is. And it shouldn't. We can change our own consciousness. To change the system requires all of us to change. And the time is now.

There's a racial continuum in our order of service. Most of us will slide up and down it from time to time, but we are all intelligent enough—and hopefully honest enough--to know where we are on that continuum and to know where we eventually should be on that continuum. I recognize myself

at different times in being in many of these categories. When Black Lives Matter started, I even thought, “Well, all lives matter.” Of course, all lives matter, but I didn’t fully embrace the message of Black Lives Matter. Now, I get it.

It’s tough to change. Changing takes work—a lot of work. It takes desire, reading, engaging with others, open thinking, developing a higher understanding, trusting, and changing bit by bit. Are we willing to accept who we really are and to accept our responsibility to change? I think we are and now is the right time to do it. There is momentum and it will build everyday with all of us working at it. Let’s make someday be now.



