

## Chapter 12: Where Do We Go from Here?

### Summary:

DiAngelo introduces a new paradigm (that is, a new way of thinking and acting) that can lead to more constructive moments and build a better society. It first begins when someone gives you feedback on the racist behaviors you act out unwittingly. Instead of feeling attacked, shamed, etc (see page 119 for list of common feelings) we should feel a sense of humility, compassion, interest, and gratitude someone is attempting to help you become a better person. Guilt and discomfort are still natural feelings in this moment, but they are not feelings we should dwell on and exacerbate into aggressively defensive actions.

When we have these constructive feelings, our behaviors go from crying, denial, arguing, etc. to listening, engaging, reflection, and apology. This then leads positive claims such as (142):

- I appreciate this feedback
- This is very helpful
- I have some work to do

Additionally, when we're not constantly on the defensive and have a better environment that promotes engagement and growth, we can carry a set of informed assumptions such as (142-143):

- Being good/bad is not relevant in this situation [the focus is on the action]
- Racism is a multilayered system embedded in our culture
- All of us are socialized into the system of racism
- Bias is implicit and unconscious; I don't expect to be aware of mine without a lot of ongoing effort
- White comfort maintains the racial status quo, so discomfort is necessary and important
- The antidote to guilt is action
- It takes courage to break with white solidarity; how can I support those who do?

With this new frame of mind, racism can be interrupted in the following ways (143):

- Minimize defensiveness
- Demonstrates our vulnerability, humility, and curiosity
- Allow for growth
- Ensure action
- Demonstrate what we practice our values

- Build authentic relationships and trust
- Interrupt internalized superiority

DiAngelo provides three points of advice for those wondering how to go about disrupting racism. The first is a reflection question: "What has enabled you to be a full, educated, professional adult and not know what to do about racism?" (144). The second point of advice is to start incorporating the above paradigm/thought process into your everyday life and thoughts. And the last point of advice is to "take the initiative and find out on your own" (144). That is, don't depend on people of color to teach you in person because there are a ton of resources out there by people of color for us to consume and become better. It's always been there, but we've either been oblivious or disinterested in racism to read a book, listen to a podcast, or watch a movie. We can also get this information by demanding it from our school boards and local institutions of higher learning (community colleges and universities).

Concerning white guilt that comes with anti-racism education, DiAngelo shares a quote from Audre Lorde's address to the National Women's Studies Association Conference in 1981:

*"I cannot hide my anger to spare you guilt, nor hurt feelings, nor answering anger; for to do so insults and trivializes all our efforts. Guilt is not a response to anger; it is a response to one's own actions or lack of action. If it leads to change then it can be useful, since it is then no longer guilt but the beginning of knowledge. Yet all too often, guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness."* (148)

DiAngelo then explains that the point of uncovering racism is not to foster white guilt because we all were born into this society and socialized into racism against our will. What is key is we are responsible for our role and actions within society, and that if we work to undo racism we can have a clearer conscious.

Next, DiAngelo answers whether it's possible to create a positive white identity through reclamation of ethnic European cultures that were lost due to assimilation in the United States. She says a positive white identity is impossible because the white identity is inherently racist since white people do not exist outside of the system of white supremacy. So if we all start claiming different European ethnicities like Irish or Polish and say everything is good we would be denying the existence of our country's racial structure. Instead, DiAngelo says she works to become "less white" in the sense that she doesn't want to be racially oppressive. She accomplishes this by becoming "more racially aware, to be better educated about racism, and to continually challenge racial certitude and arrogance" (150). She also attributes building and

sustaining cross-racial relationships, accepting she enacts patterns of racial behavior, breaking white silence and white solidarity and white privilege and white comfort, and to move past guilt into action. All of which will take an increased level of courage and intentionality.

### **Analysis & Commentary:**

DiAngelo's new paradigm of feelings, behaviors, assumptions, and claims provides a good baseline on how to move forward, but it will take practice. I believe that our culture has conditioned us to be perfectionists to the extent that any flaw triggers a lot of defensive reactions. Additionally, our culture seems to have conditioned us to be arrogant instead of humble, and to deny, blame, or excuse our actions rather than take responsibility for them instead. Somewhere in our development and socialization, taking responsibility for our mistakes became equal to showing weakness. In reality, nothing could be weaker than continuous defensiveness, blaming, and excuses, but something in our culture has stigmatized and devalued taking responsibility.

This new paradigm is built on having a sense of humility, taking responsibility for your words and actions, and seeing feedback as a critique of our words, ideas, and actions rather than being a critique of us as individual people. That is, we currently take everything personally when in reality it shouldn't be personal. Again, there is something embedded in our culture that makes everything about us as a person rather than examining our words, ideas, and actions. I don't know what exactly it is, but I hope we can figure that out as we move forward in our journey in social justice.

When she gives her advice regarding what to do about solving racism, I feel DiAngelo could've written her reflection question better. I'd paraphrase it to basically say "How come you as a functioning and capable adult don't know how to disrupt racism?" Like she says, it's a genuine question, not one to make you feel like an idiot. The question makes you reflect on the forces that have kept you away from learning about racism and how to address it. I highly suggest you take some time and jot down some notes in a journal or notepad. Call it your social justice reflection journal or notes.

Her two other points of advice are straightforward: start incorporating that new way of thinking (being humble, taking responsibility, having awareness of your thoughts and actions, etc.) into your daily life, and keep reading/watching/listening to other anti-racist and social justice oriented products.

The idea of a positive white identity is loaded. On the one hand, I feel there's an increasing desire within the white community to dismantle institutional oppression and remove white supremacy from both culture and internalized attitudes because we realize that our country is not actually living up to the values it has professed. However, on the other hand, more and more studying of white culture and whiteness in general brings the conclusion that white supremacy is the foundation of white identity—that the heart of being white are the ideas that we're better than everyone else and we have priority to society's resources because others who are not white are undeserving. I think it's possible that not all of us consciously believe that, yet it's still hardwired into our brains due to socialization. It's always going to be there.

Re-embracing ethnic European heritages feels like a good move. I feel this way because ethnic cultures have existed as a means for survival and knowledge transmission from generation to generation. Minority communities have survived our society's racial terrorism because their cultures provided a lifeline when institutional power has either tried to eliminate entire ethnicities or forced them to assimilate so much so that there would no longer be any kind of ethnic identity left. In this sense, there too must be wisdom and value in ethnic European cultures. Our job is to examine these cultures and bring back any positive practices while leaving anything that would bring about harm.

Bringing back ethnic European culture does not absolve us white supremacy, though. I think it will help pivot our culture away from white supremacy, but there is so much work that needs to be done. We're only at the beginning.