

Chapter 6: Anti-Blackness

Summary:

The chapter begins with DiAngelo saying that white people need to take a step back from their individualization and start seeing themselves as a racial group. Being able to view oneself as an individual is a specific white privilege because people of color are not seen as unique individuals but as members of generalized groups. When we're able to view ourselves as a racial group we begin to undo this privilege and are able to examine what it means to be white in our society.

To understand whiteness, DiAngelo points out that the idea of whiteness revolves around blackness because the concept of race did not exist until there was a need to justify the enslavement of Africans. By creating an inferior race that allowed for enslavement, a superior race had to come into existence. Without blackness there would be no white identity. And from there, white people have continuously projected onto Black people negative traits and characteristics that white people don't want to identify with. The examples given by DiAngelo include how slave masters described Africans as lazy and childlike although they constantly labored in grueling conditions under the threat of torture and death, or how today Black people are portrayed as aggressive criminals (91).

[Note: More on the social creation of race and the projection of negative characteristics will be covered in Kendi's *Stamped from the Beginning* and Painter's *The History of White People*.]

Today, anti-blackness from whites occurs in many ways, including (91-93):

--Negativity toward Affirmative Action

--The School-to-Prison Pipeline

--Disproportional mass incarceration

--"White Flight" from suburban neighborhoods when 7% of the neighborhood becomes occupied by Black families (DiAngelo cites a study that says white people prefer neighborhoods that are no more than 30% Black, so white tolerance for Black neighbors is actually much lower)

--The approval of police brutality against Black Children

--Saying "all lives matter" or "blue lives matter" in response to the Black Lives Matter movement.

--Large gatherings of neo Nazis and white nationalists marching with tiki torches

DiAngelo states that anti-blackness comes from “misinformation, fables, perversion, projections, and lies” as well as “a lack of historical knowledge and an inability or unwillingness to trace the effects of history into the present” (94). But what is most troubling is that anti-blackness “comes from deep guilt about what we have done and continue to do; the unbearable knowledge of our complicity with the profound torture of black [sic] people from past to present” (94). DiAngelo implies that the suppression of this guilt results in a moral trauma for white people. White people then continue to suppress this trauma by the continued dehumanization and victim blaming of Black people, and white righteousness then emerges. DiAngelo summarizes her position with this statement:

[Note: More on white resentment and cruelty toward Black people, particularly when there are moments of Black advancement within society, will be covered in Anderson’s *White Rage*.]

DiAngelo finishes the chapter by describing another form of anti-blackness: using Black people to feel noble and warm, such as white people “saving” Black people from a negatively perceived blackness with generosity. The pop-culture example she uses is *The Blind Side*, how the white Tuohy family rescued Michael Oher from poverty and abuse to become an NFL player. DiAngelo lists several problematic ideologies whites have toward Blacks, including (97-98):

--"White Saviorism"

--Some Black children are innocent, but all Black adults are corrupt

--Helping Black people comes at great personal cost but makes the white person better than other whites

--Black people can only overcome their challenges with the help of white people

--All Black people are poor, incompetent, and unqualified for their jobs as they belong to gangs, are addicted to drugs, and are bad parents

Analysis & Commentary:

It’s crazy to think that the concept of race isn’t that old, something like 500 years old when the African slave trade became established. Compare this to how long humans have existed,

something like 200,000 years (according to a quick Google search). And when you have science backing up that all humans are biologically the same, it's clear that race is a social construction. What stings the most is how we whites have a hard time actually seeing and treating people of color as equals all because our group identity rests on an idea that we're better than everyone else. And we know this is flat out false when we see how we treat not only people of color but ourselves.

DiAngelo stated we white people have historically projected our undesirable traits and characteristics onto Black people and other people of color. It's as if we do this because we're in denial that we are not superior after all. It seems if we place all our faults and Black people then there's justification for treating them horribly, when the reality is we're the tormented ones because we can't live up to the identity our ancestors created for us.

For example, our white society says Black people are hyper violent and prone to criminal behavior—the amount of Black people in jail and prison backs this up. However, if we take a step back and look at the larger picture of society, we see white men are more often terrorizing everybody via lone-wolf mass shootings and vigilante crime organizations like the KKK and other white supremacist organizations. Compare this to how anyone associated with BLM has never killed or injured a person, yet white people run around and call BLM a terrorist organization. Often you hear commentators saying look at the amount of Black-on-Black crime, but what about white-on-white crime that happens so much yet is vastly under reported on news networks.

When DiAngelo says anti-blackness comes from misinformation, lies, a lack of historical knowledge, and the unwillingness to learn about history is a huge reflection on our white culture. First, it shows how our schools have never taught us our true history and legacy in America. When I say “Reconstruction Era” what are the first images or messages that pops up in your head? Take a few moments and jot it down...

From my wonderful “No Child Left Behind” era education, the images of reconstruction I have contains the South rebuilding its cities after Sherman burned it all down, more states becoming established in the West, a railroad was built and put the Pony Express out of business, and then Edison invented a lot of things. Somewhere deep down in there might be a blurb about how a lot of Black people moved north for more job opportunities because they were now free and didn't like the “separate but equal” set-up of the new South. Whatever era you had your US History classes, it probably looked a lot like that. So imagine reading other history books, ones in bookstores and not in classrooms, and thinking you picked up a horror novel instead.

The information is out there in books, media, and people of color trying to educate us on places like Twitter. Yet we look the other way. Is it because we're too proud to look? Is it arrogance? Or is it something more unsettling: truth. Truth that we as white people have done some seriously deranged acts in our history. This is what DiAngelo was getting onto when she says we as a group are morally traumatized and actively suppress our guilt and trauma. It's easier not to look. It's easier to double down, because to look at truth means you cannot deny the truth (or else you're an obviously liar). And when we look at the truth we'll see that our identity of white superiority is a sham. And for those who have really made that a part of their identity, the results of looking at truth could be world shattering: your whole existence was built on a lie. So rather than accept that fact and begin anew, people double down.

The saddest part is that after people double down, people of color continue to get killed. We need to face truth to end the cycle of unnecessary suffering and death in our society.

Before ending I want to challenge you to think of a movie or TV series that either doesn't accurately represent a community of color or perpetuates the myth of the white savior. If you can't think of any off the top of your head, do you think this is because you may have believed all the cultural representations Hollywood has brought us? Remember, most movie and TV executives are white men, so they're going to want a product that aligns to their view of other cultures. The work we must do involves learning what the actual cultures of these communities is so whenever we see misrepresentations in the media we can call them out and increase our awareness while also putting an end to stereotypes and misinformation.