

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

Robin DiAngelo

PRA663A – Leadership in Cross-Cultural: Foundations

Martin Edward Lee, December 16, 2019

“The world is like a drunken peasant,” Luther said with his usual inspired realism. “If you lift him into the saddle on one side, he will fall off again on the other side.”¹ DiAngelo is like that drunken peasant. She attempts to address the racist ideologies of past regimes, quoting Charles W. Mills who says, “white supremacy has shaped Western political thought for hundreds of years,”² then goes on to mimic the rhetoric of white supremacists, directing it *against* white people.

DiAngelo’s rhetoric is all about class rivalry on the basis of race, claiming that we cannot study a sociopolitical system without addressing how that system is mediated by race.³ In a 1923 interview, Hitler said, “We demand the fulfilment of the just claims of the productive classes by the state on the basis of race solidarity. To us state and race are one.”⁴ DiAngelo demands “the fulfilment of the just claims of the productive classes” against the dominant race of the state. She argues for an end to white entitlement.⁵ “...[T]he full weight of responsibility rests with those who control the institutions,”⁶ DiAngelo says. For her, white racism is “systemic, societal, institutional, omnipresent, and epistemologically embedded phenomenon that pervades every vestige of our reality”⁷ and “shapes all of us [whites].”⁸

DiAngelo does not cite research or data; instead she only justifies her position with quotations from other like-minded theorists. She all but admits there is no research or data to illustrate the

¹ Luther, Martin, “Luther’s Works: Volume 54”, (Concordia Publishing House, 1533.), 111.

² DiAngelo, Robin, “White Fragility: Why it’s so hard for White People to talk about Racism.” (Beacon Press: Boston, 2018.),

³ DiAngelo.,

⁴ Hitler, Adolph, <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/sep/17/greatinterviews1>, ('No room for the Alien, No Use for the Wastrel', This edited interview of Adolf Hitler by George Sylvester Viereck took place in 1923. It was republished in Liberty magazine in July 1932).

⁵ DiAngelo.,

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 72.

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influence of white supremacy in the West, but claims the absence of evidence *is* the evidence, since white supremacists control the institutions and create a false consciousness.⁹ She argues, “The failure to acknowledge white supremacy protects it from examination and holds it in place.” Diangelo quotes Coates, who says institutional white supremacists “cover the sin of national plunder with the sin of national lying. The lie ignores that fact that reducing American poverty and ending white supremacy are not the same...White supremacy is not merely the work of hotheaded demagogues, or a matter of false consciousness, but a force so fundamental to America that it is difficult to imagine the country without it.”¹⁰

Diangelo offers no solution to this race-based class rivalry, rather a conversion-type experience: a way to view the world through a race-based lens. There is no ‘fix’ for white people, even forbidding white women to express grief through tears, (describing them as “entitlements”¹¹) since today’s white-women’s tears are reminiscent of yesteryear’s white-women’s tears that caused lynchings of black men in the early 1900’s. Diangelo recaps a story where she made inappropriate racist comments to a black employee and needed to acknowledge her racist remarks and repair the relationship. She remarks, “It is difficult for me to imagine that my aforementioned interaction with Angela would have been as constructive if it had occurred before I began this work. I simply could not and would not have responded well if I had been operating from the dominant paradigm.”¹²

⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 131.

¹² Ibid., 141.

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Diangelo's recommended conversion to race-based class-consciousness is no positive evolution.

Being African American, I had hoped for more: a nation where our children are “not judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”¹³

¹³ King Jr., Martin, Luther, <https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>. (1963.), 5.