

White Fragility. Ch. 6

Anti-Blackness....

But all our phrasing— race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy— serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. . . . You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body. —Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me

DiAngelo, Robin J.. White Fragility (p. 89). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.

87 – We whites are not unique or ‘outside’ of race.

- Ideologies of Racism
 1. Individualism
 2. Colorblindness

88 – To Challenge the ideologies of racism such as individualism and color blindness, we as white people must suspend our perception of ourselves as unique and/or outside of race.

89 – People of color have different experiences based on several factors

1. How group members have adapted to the dominant culture
2. How they have been represented.
3. How they have been positioned in relation to other groups of color
4. The ‘role’ the group has been assigned by the dominant society.

- What is the uniquely anti-black sentiment integral to white identity...at the societal level?

- We live in a culture that circulates relentless messages of white superiority and black inferiority.

90 – Whiteness has always been predicated on blackness.

- Blackness is essential to the creation of white identity.

91- Whites Rule.... Blacks serve

– Affirmative Action is a tool to ensure *qualified* minority applicants are given the same employment opportunities as white people.

92 – Face it... Studies show whites do not want to integrate with blacks.

The early American economy was built on slave labor. The Capitol and the White House were built by slaves. President James K. Polk traded slaves from the Oval Office. The laments about “black pathology,” the criticism of black family structures by pundits and intellectuals, ring hollow in a country whose existence was predicated on the torture of black fathers, on the rape of black mothers, on the sale of black children. An honest assessment of America’s relationship to the black family reveals the country to be not its nurturer but its destroyer. And this destruction did not end with slavery. 6 Coates.

94 – Anti-blackness comes from deep guilt about what we have done and continue to do... the unbearable knowledge of our complicity with the torture of black people from past to present.

- We can only identify as white... if we see someone else as ‘non-white’.

95 – The white collective fundamentally hates blackness for what it reminds us of: that we are capable of and guilty of perpetrating immeasurable harm and that our gain come through the subjugation of others.

- NFL players who protest police brutality against African Americans should thank God they don’t have to worry about being shot in the head “like they would be in North Korea. (Pastor Robert Jeffries, advisor to President Trump). On “Fox and Friends.”

96- The trigger for white rage, inevitably, is black advancement.

- “The Blind Side” A confusing stew of benevolence and resentment (Only benevolent whites can save blacks from the terrors of their own community.)

98 - The Tuohys, of course, are the good whites, who have to deal with the prejudice of the individual bad whites they encounter at the country club and other places. In this way, the racist = bad / not racist = good binary is also reinforced. The film is fundamentally and insidiously anti-black. White racial socialization engenders many conflicting feelings.

The reinforcement of dominant white ideologies.

Examples:

- White people are the saviors of black people.
- Some black children may be innocent, but black adults are morally and criminally corrupt.
- Whites who are willing to save or otherwise help black people, at seemingly great personal cost, are noble, courageous, and morally superior to other whites.
- Individual black people can overcome their circumstances, but usually only with the help of white people.
- Black neighborhoods are inherently dangerous and criminal.
- Virtually all blacks are poor, incompetent, and unqualified for their jobs; they belong to gangs, are addicted to drugs, and are bad parents.
- The most dependable route for black males to escape the “inner city” is through sports.
- White people are willing to deal with individual “deserving” black people, but whites do not become a part of the black community in any meaningful way (beyond charity work).

98 - White racial socialization engenders many conflicting feelings toward African Americans: benevolence, resentment, superiority, hatred, and guilt roil barely below the surface and erupt at the slightest breach, yet can never be explicitly acknowledged. Our need to deny the bewildering manifestations of anti-blackness that reside so close to the surface makes us irrational, and that irrationality is at the heart of white fragility and the pain it causes people of color.

DiAngelo, Robin J.. *White Fragility* (p. 98). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Chapter 6 ANTI-BLACKNESS

- 1. The author claims that in the white mind, black people are the ultimate racial other. What does this mean?**
- 2. What does it mean to say that anti-blackness is present across all communities of color, even within black communities?**
- 3. How does the author make the case that the construction of white identity and white superiority was in fact dependent upon the simultaneous creation of a particular *idea* of blackness? How are these ideas sustained?**
- 4. What are some of the misunderstandings about affirmative action and what do these misunderstandings reveal about anti-blackness?**
- 5. Why haven't affirmative action programs changed our racial outcomes?**
- 6. What does the author mean when she suggests that causing pain and suffering for black people rests on a sense of white righteousness?**
- 7. The author states that the film *The Blind Side* is "insidiously anti-black." Using the framework of the book, explain how a viewer can not notice the anti-black messages yet still be shaped by them.**
- 8. Consider the bulleted list following the author's analysis of *The Blind Side*. In which other films have you seen these racial scripts?**

More Questions to tease you with....

What are some constructive ways to use your emotional reactions when your opinions on racism are challenged?

What does it mean to say that race is “socially constructed”?

What is the impact of white people not knowing our racial history?

What does the author mean when she says that white people are not, in fact, racially innocent? How can we know much about race if we have lived separately?

What does it mean to say that racism is “a structure, not an event”?

The author claims that in the white mind, Black people are the ultimate racial other. What does this mean?

What are some of the misunderstandings about affirmative action and what do these misunderstandings reveal about anti-Blackness?

How does the author challenge the idea that our intentions are “what count”?

Share a time that you experienced your own white fragility or witnessed another white person’s.

What are the opportunities and dilemmas of white people educating each other on racism?

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United Methodist **Insight**

A Forum for Discerning God's Will for The United Methodist Church

Embracing Whole Truth About Methodism and Race

by [Ian Straker](#)

September 9, 2020

Sept. 9, 2020 | MADISON, N.J.— In his recent UM News commentary, titled “Slavery and the Founders of Methodism,” the Rev. William B. Lawrence shares important truths about the history of Methodism and slavery, and, by implication, Methodism and race.

He rightly points out that some early American Methodists joined Methodism’s founder, John Wesley, in consistently denouncing slavery. He also reminds us through the recent legislative initiatives of our Methodist brother, U.S. Sen. Thomas Cotton of Arkansas, that how we remember and how we teach our shared history of slavery and racism are essential in how we shape our future.

Within six months of the founding Christmas Conference in 1784, the Baltimore Conference (over which Asbury presided after fellow Bishop Thomas Coke returned to England) suspended the rule on slavery. A strict adherence to the rule banning slave owners from membership hindered the expansion of the church in the South and prevented Methodist preachers from having access to slaves. In order to properly nurture the seeds planted at its founding, Asbury and others deemed it prudent to be selective about what would be said and where. By 1804, even separate northern and southern editions of the Book of Discipline were being prepared.

The strategic retreat from a staunch anti-slavery stance yielded benefits for the growing church. By relaxing the rule on slavery and eventually allowing different regions of the church to chart their own courses on interpreting and enforcing the rule, Asbury was able to proclaim, “Our tabernacle is crowded again: the minds of the people are strangely changed; and the indignation excited against us is overpast: the people see and confess that the slaves are made better by religion; and wonder to hear the poor Africans pray and exhort.” Pragmatism and church growth won out over spiritual purity.

It was not the last time such a choice was made.

Early Methodist compromises made over slavery do not diminish the fact that Methodist anti-slavery preaching did indeed lead to the emancipation of hundreds of slaves in the late colonial and early national periods. But in places where slavery was entrenched and resistance to abolition was strong, the idea that slavery, racism and Methodism could peacefully coexist took deep roots that continue to bear fruit into the 21st century.

And we must not overlook the truth that being anti-slavery was not at all synonymous with being pro-equality. Lawrence mentions the establishment of independent African-American Methodist denominations. Today’s Union American Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion and Christian Methodist Episcopal churches would not have come about had African-American Methodists been consistently treated with respect and dignity by their white siblings.

Yes, there is much in the early history of American Methodism to celebrate concerning race relations and slavery. Some courageous circuit riders and society members endured beatings and even death for adhering to the standards set by John Wesley. And later Methodists, such as Bishop Gilbert Haven and courageous Methodist women like Georgia Harkness and Thelma Stevens, worked in their times to perfect a more just, racially inclusive church and society.

Unfortunately, despite their passion and commitment, their vision was never shared by the majority of their Methodist peers. In the reunification of the church in 1939, pragmatism won out once more with the formation of the shameful Central Jurisdiction.

A full accounting of the Methodist track record on race reveals that in every era of the church’s life, race has been a source of contention and strife. Senator Cotton’s misleading argument that the nation’s founders understood slavery to be a “necessary evil” would not have swayed Wesley, but it does highlight the importance of accurately and fully knowing, embracing and sharing our history — warts and all. We are living that contested history now, many of us armed with the hope that this time we will get it right: Justice will achieve a lasting victory, racism and its cohort “isms” will be defeated, and united Methodists will lead the world into a vision of Christian peace and love.

If we are to reach that promised land, we must journey together with our eyes open to the whole truth.

*The Rev. Ian Straker is an elder in the New York Annual Conference, a religious historian and editorial board member of the journal *Methodist History*, and a trustee of the African American Methodist History Center in Madison, N.J. This commentary was prepared with input from the center's executive board. The center focuses on procuring, preserving and promoting the history of Methodism among persons of African descent. For more information, visit the center's [website](#) or its [Facebook page](#).*