***White Fragility: Why it’s so Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*/ Robin DiAngelo** Foreword by Michael Eric Dyson. Boston, Beacon Press, 2018.

**Main thesis:** White people are incapable of racial justice because they are unable to see all the ways in which they implicitly perpetuate racism. When they do respond to claims of being racist, they are defensive and exhibits a wide range of emotions such as anger, fear, guilt, silence, argument, and so on. They are “fragile.”

Dr. DiAngelo means well and has identified many issues that need addressing. Yes,white people must speak up and address the concerns and problems that are erupting daily. Yes, Racism is a thorn in the side of this nation and a destructive force. Yes, the United States of America rests on a mythological premise of equality, justice, and liberty for all. This myth has benefited members of the whiterace and those of white European Male ancestry. I emphasized the term white in this summary because the members of white race are the intended audience of this book.

DiAngelo introduces her book with an explanation of “identity politics.” She explains in her author’s note that although the United States rests on a philosophical belief that all men are “created equal,” the actuality of this country’s history is much different. Also, the term “men” literally means White European Males. DiAngelo explains that ‘identity politics refers to the focus on the barriers that specific groups face in their struggles for equality. We have yet to achieve our founding principle, but any gains we have made thus far have come through Identity politics.”[[1]](#footnote-1) (DiAngelo, xiii)

In the first pages of the foreword, Mr. Dyson, the foreword’s author identifies race, and racism as a multitude of metaphors. Throughout the opening pages, he lays the problems and lack of racial understanding at the feet of the “white” population. He introduces the concept of white dominance and identifies that this white dominance is the basis of Racism. Although he identifies “whiteness” as a problem, he recognizes it as a myth a social construct that works because everyone of all races buys into and supports. He explains that Racism works- because Racism works most effectively when it is denied. He introduces DiAngelo as a member of the ranks of anti-racist thinkers. Anti-Racists call on the white population and identify its lack of racial awareness. This lack of racial identity has become the “National Identity.”

Through the pages of this book, DiAngelo defines this National Identity and coins it, *White Fragility*. She goes on to identify that gains made by any group come about with the permission and recognition of a need for change by the dominant group (White European Male). Without that sanction or authorization of the dominant group, the changes would never have been part of history.

In chapter 2, DiAngelo begins to explicitly state that the problems of race and Racism are the result of *whites because of their narrow, ignorant view of*the world and themselves. She uses several words or phrases that may seem to overlap but do not. Each one has a shade and layer of meaning and becomes the foundation or basis for two additional terms White Fragility and White Privilege.

**Race:** grouping of human species into distinct groups based on genetic or natural physical and behavioral differences. Races may have separate, apparent differences such as facial features, hair texture, and skin color, but these differences do not serve as intellectual or mental characteristics over another. Race distinctions are social and economic constructs that were, developed and maintained to provide power, oppression, and control by whites over nonwhite racial groups.

**Racism**: the conviction that one race is superior to another; the terms prejudice and discrimination are linked to Racism. “Prejudice consists of thoughts and feelings, including stereotypes, attitudes, and generalizations based on little or no experience, and that is projected onto everyone from that group.” DiAngelo (p. 19) Discrimination is an act of behavior that one commits based on one prejudice**.** Prejudicial and discriminatory behaviors are signs of Racism. Prejudice consists of thoughts and feelings, including stereotypes, attitudes, and generalizations based on little or no experience, projected onto everyone from that group.” Discrimination is an act of behavior that one commits based on one prejudice.

**White Supremacy**: a false belief and conviction that the white race is superior to other races and should maintain economic and political control and dominance over members of other races. White Supremacy is a belief that transfers into White Privilege: White privilege is the multitude advantages (or lack of disadvantages) that society grants to white people but not to minorities. This crosses all socioeconomic lines and can include things like:

* When I was in school, most of my teachers, administrators, coaches (etc.) looked like me
* If I am convicted of a crime, I can expect not to be given a tougher sentence because of my skin color
* Companies do not reject my resume because my name sounds “too ethnic”.
* White Supremacy is the belief that you deserve the benefits of white privilege because you are white.

Using the definitions of the words, Race, Racism, and White Supremacy. DiAngelo has formulated the term White Fragility. White Fragility is the defensive behaviors and communications that the members of the white race exhibit when “whites” are challenged or confronted by Racism. DiAngelo identifies that whites exhibit anger, fear, guilt, silence, argument, and the inability to see themselves in racial terms that prevent whites from discussing racial injustice. In the next chapters, she equates how the perception of individualism and not “race” is perceived by White America and becomes part of the identity of White Fragility.

The book *White Fragility* repeats and reiterates that the world’s problems rest on the white race because it cannot recognize or see beyond white privilege. It is difficult to isolate one or two examples of this statement because DiAngelo continually points out in every chapter that the white race lack of awareness is the problem.

One of the most challenging concerns of this book is that DiAngelo does not invite the audience to engage in conversations with others and themselves about the problem she presents, but is quick to inform the readers that they are the cause of the problem. Another issue is that DiAngelo gives no agency to blacks. The book talks down to them as poor, helpless, victims of oppression—denying them of thinking for themselves and positing themselves in society. She urges white and non-black people be extremely sensitive to black people’s feelings lest they are hurt. This is patronizing. Thinking like this neither redresses racial trauma nor amplifies black people’s voices, healing, or agency against racism. These issues suggest that DiAngelo’s not listening to the voices of black people at all. In her mind, blacks appear to be an abstracted foil against which she advances her authority on this topic.

White Fragility does not offer readers solutions, but her website does give visitors specific talking points and readers’ a program guide for discussion. Links below:

Dr. DiAngelo’s website: <https://robindiangelo.com/>

Resources and program study guide; This is her program: <https://robindiangelo.com/resources/>

Readers Guide for Affinity Groups using the book *White* Fragility as a basis for discussion: [www.beacon.org/Assets/PDFs/white\_fragility\_disc\_guide.pdf](http://www.beacon.org/Assets/PDFs/white_fragility_disc_guide.pdf)

1. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy  <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/> (First published Tue Jul 16, 2002; substantive revision Sat Jul 11, 2020): The laden phrase “identity politics” has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. Rather than organizing solely around belief systems, programmatic manifestos, or party affiliation, identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its broader context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant characterizations to achieve greater self-determination. See the article for a detailed discussion and definition of “identity politics.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)