

## My Critique on White Fragility

*Shôn Ellerton, October 24, 2020*

*Robin Di Angelo's White Fragility may have been one of the most divisive books I have read, but I am glad I took the opportunity to read it. Here is my personal take on the book.*



This year would not be complete without discussing one of the most remarkable books of the year, *White Fragility* by Robin di Angelo. Remarkable because I have a lot to remark about it after reading it earlier this year. Bearing in mind that this book has sold around one million copies, most of which were sold *after* the events of George Floyd's death, and how this book has been a great influencer in identity politics and critical race theory, I felt the urge to write something about my thoughts concerning this book.

This book is an opinion piece from an author that centralises upon the notion that a white person cannot be non-racist if they do not actively confront racism, or at least admit that they will never understand what it is like being a person of colour or why white privilege is so problematic. One of the striking themes of the book is that the author does not allow the notion of colour-blindness as being an antidote for racism, a tenet which sits neatly into the philosophy of Dr Martin Luther King.

The author is honest to say from the outset that she makes no apologies for the book being rooted in identity politics and that she is addressing to a common white dynamic.<sup>1</sup> She makes it abundantly clear that white people have difficulties talking about racism, which, to be fair is generally true. Although, there are some, including me, who do not. The author does not seem to suggest that one of the possible main reasons why white people do not feel comfortable talking about racism, is that the subject is so incredibly sensitive, that saying the

wrong thing could have major repercussions, whether it be in the workplace, social media or amongst friends and acquaintances.

Interestingly, she states that people who do not identify as white may find her book useful as a guide to understanding why it is difficult to talk to white people about racism.<sup>2</sup>

In many ways, I can relate to this. For example, if you were excluded from being part of the football team because you have acute asthma and constantly run out of breath, it could be quite awkward to discuss with the other team members about it not being fair for not being selected for the team. However, this is a physical condition which is beyond the means to easily change and it could be said that the other team members would be very open and honest in having that discussion. However, if the same question is due to a condition not bearing on a physical limitation, for example, a gay person who feels excluded from being accepted into a society or other organisation because of his or her sexual orientation, could the same reasoning apply? I could argue that the gay person feeling excluded would muster more recourse to argue and discuss the topic with members of the society or organisation in question. Could this same reasoning apply to people of colour who feel misrepresented in white society? It is possible.

One of the biggest contentions I have with Di Angelo's book is how she summarily mentions the complications of multiracial people, which she discussed in her author's note—we have not even got to Chapter 1 yet. Her comment stating that multiracial people may not be seen as 'real' people of colour or 'real' whites<sup>3</sup>, is an extraordinary claim to make. She also does not make any mention of racial differences between white people, of which, there have been many throughout the history of the United States and Europe.

My Chinese wife gave me a son who looks traditionally 'white'. Without knowing him, one would not consider for one moment that he is, in fact, half Chinese. On the reverse side of things, I know another mixed Asian/White couple who have twins who look decidedly Chinese. To make the assertion that children of mixed races may not be seen as 'real' people of colour or 'real' white people is plainly ridiculous. Why should *anyone* claim to be one or the other or even bother thinking about it in the first place? Throughout the remaining book, the author's focus on people of colour clearly excludes those from Asian, Arabic or Indian societies. They do not seem to 'count' in her book.

Di Angelo, in her book, gives an example, in Chapter One, that one can be seen as qualified to lead a major or minor organisation without having any knowledge of racism or perspectives of people of colour.<sup>4</sup>

She infers that it is short-sighted and narrowminded not having any of this knowledge and that this could only be achieved through investing time in diversity courses. It may not have occurred to the author that most leaders of organisations and companies attained their positions via the pathway of merit and success. I have personally not come across any leader who had any thought of excluding a person for a position based on colour, or gender, for that matter. If anything, there are many, in preference, that would choose a person of colour or woman, because of the potential negative repercussions of being deemed a white supremacist, a phrase very much in vogue this year albeit, of course, in a negative way.

In the same chapter, Di Angelo is quick to point out that phrases like ‘people just need to be taught to respect one another’ prematurely ends any meaningful dialogue of racism and that they are further seen as unconvincing to most people of colour.<sup>5</sup>

This statement, along with her arguments held later in the book that being ‘colour-blind’ is, in itself, racist is one of the primary themes of this book. There is a section in an article I wrote back in 2019, [\*How Do We Learn to Hate Each Other\*](#), discussing how young children from all racial backgrounds can play with each other and how identity politics is removed from their world. I was brought up in such an environment that racism was a bad thing. And it is very bad. When I think of racism as a child, I think of racism in the traditional sense as that portrayed by watching *Roots* or of the history of the Ku Klux Klan. We were also taught the wise tenets of Martin Luther King who declared that everyone should be treated equally regardless of race, creed or colour. The author wishes us to go down the corridor of racism whether we like it or not by denouncing those that claim that we should all treat people with respect. However, the book would not be in existence if the author claimed that statement!

Robin di Angelo does make for some interesting and factual reading in her section, The Perception of Race, in Chapter 2. She runs off a little history of those who were perceived as being white and those who were not during early US history up to the years of the ‘great melting pot’ in the early 1900s. For

example, she gives the example of Armenians winning their case of being re-classified as being white because they were scientifically classed as Caucasians. However, the Supreme Court in 1922 ruled that the Japanese were not considered white because they were classed as Mongoloid.<sup>6</sup>

Incidentally, the term of Caucasian for white is, in my opinion, a bizarre one and grossly outdated. We have come a very long way to what we were; however, what is clear is that there always seems to be an underclass in society who feels being oppressed at any point in history. Take for example, *The Jungle*, a book published in 1906 by Upton Sinclair who wrote about the disgusting conditions of the meat packaging and food industry of the late 1800s and early 1900s in the United States prompting the birth of food agencies to ensure that we are not being systematically poisoned. Like the more recent book, *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser, it soured the stomachs of the American reader and took to storm on the shelves of bookshops and libraries. In Upton Sinclair's book, part of it focussed on the once-oppressed Irish community in Chicago. However, as soon as the Polish immigrants arrived, it was the Irish who became promoted on the 'caste system' leaving the Polish to endure the oppressed conditions the Irish once had.

However, black people were treated atrociously, particularly in the Deep South with the Jim Crow laws and segregation policies up to as late as the 1960s. Much of the history which Di Angelo alludes to in this historical segment could be said for being largely responsible for this gross miscarriage of justice. My question is *why* did we still have to classify people of race at all once the Jim Crow laws had ended? In our modern day, why do we have to include ethnicity checkboxes on so many forms we need to fill in during our lives? Incidentally, I wrote an article on this subject titled [\*Is It Time to Get Rid of Ethnicity Checkboxes?\*](#) where I discuss this in more detail. I share the same reasoning most kids have on the subject of identity politics, and that is this. 'Frankly, I don't give a damn!' I wish this could be true in reality, but identity politics has crept into just about every niche in today's society and I believe it is a cause for a worrying trend in further divisions of society along with less tolerant views of others. Hence why I read the book and written a critique on it.

Later in the chapter, Di Angelo highlights an important point whereby forms of exclusion based on gender, race or other points of difference are often backed by a legal authority or institutional control.<sup>7</sup>

She points out that, for example, women of colour were deemed the right to vote in 1964 but only because of those making the decision were clearly not women of colour. Likewise, segregation and apartheid are only stopped by those who have the power to do so and if they do not do so, it has sometimes been necessary to openly revolt to make the necessary changes. However, this only works if there is a tangible reason for doing so. Women not being allowed to vote, for example, is a very real tangible reason. People of colour not being allowed to sit in front of the bus was certainly a tangible one. However, we are now being given the narrative that systemic racism is rife in today's institutional structures even if it may not be there in the first place or able to be proven so. The only tangible example of that is the recent case of the Asian student who did not get passed into Harvard because of being negatively discriminated because he was Asian and more likely to get higher grades. Harvard claimed that they were rejecting his application based on his dry and humourless character. Earlier on this month, it was reported by the [New York Times](#) that the Justice Department is suing Yale for illegal race discrimination which violates the Civil Rights Act of 1964 when white and Asian students were discriminated against during university admission selection programs because they were statistically more likely to get in. If there is an example of institutionalised systemic racism, this is it.

In the next paragraph, Di Angelo points out that ideology is forced upon us from birth and that we must accept and not to question it.<sup>8</sup>

That is sometimes the case, but to state that ideology is forced upon us without question is not quite true, unless you are from a communist nation or a theocracy of course. State education in the United States is certainly varied in terms of quality. The biggest difference that can be made is how good the teacher is and how much latitude the institution gives the teacher to his or her students. I was lucky to have an exceptionally good English teacher in twelfth grade; a man by the name of Mr. Klein, who taught us how to think rationally, individually, critically and most importantly, how not to get sucked into everyday ideology simply because everyone else does so. Di Angelo is quite right suggesting that the ideologies of capitalism, democracy and consumerism is strongly encouraged in American society but as an individual who is taught how to think critically, there may be other ideologies over those of what is generally accepted that may best apply in a given circumstance. I believe that such teachings could eradicate much of the symbolic ideology which so many

blindly follow without giving any forethought as to why the ideology exists in the first place.

Di Angelo's book is laden with conflations, for example, she suggests that people of colour may hold prejudices against white people but lack the social and institutional power that transforms their prejudice and discrimination into racism.<sup>9</sup>

She further gives an example that a person of colour cannot pass legislation to stop a white person going into a shop; however, the inverse could apply, whereby a white person *could* have legislation to stop the person of colour entering the shop. Therefore, claiming that racism can only be delved from the white person to the person of colour and not the other way around. I understand that the author makes it clear in the beginning that the book is directed towards audiences within the United States and other nation-states which are predominantly white, but this logic is so bizarrely twisted to the point of being nonsensical.

Not far off in the same chapter, Di Angelo then states that many whites see racism as a thing of the past and that racial disparity between whites and people of colour continues to exist in every institution and, in many cases, increasing.<sup>10</sup>

I agree with Di Angelo from her inference that racism still exists, and to be honest, I will go further in saying that racism will *always* exist. But to state without any evidence or reference in her book that it is prevalent in every institution and, in many cases, increasing is a grossly out-of-proportion allegation. If anything, there is a strong argument to suggest that racism has *decreased*, certainly during the last hundred, or even fifty, years. However, it seems where issues are at their least, is where they are accentuated. Take the quote from Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

‘The amount of violations of human rights in a country is always an inverse function of the amount of complaints about human rights violations heard from there. The greater the number of complaints being aired, the better protected are human rights in that country’ – Daniel Patrick Moynihan

Introduce a book like *White Fragility* to a nation which has severe racial or other issues of human rights, it would most likely be laughed at being deemed a mere ‘first world problem’!

Interestingly enough, *if* the book was deemed as being valid for a non-predominantly white nation, Di Angelo throws herself into a circular argument when she mentions later in the same section that racism is not fluid and does not change direction simply because a few individuals of colour manage to excel.<sup>11</sup> In other words, *reverse* racism does not exist according to the author.

I beg to differ, if any member of any race opine that their race is superior to another regardless of colour or creed, that defines racism.

Di Angelo later discusses those rare people of colour like Colin Powell, Clarence Thomas, Marco Rubio, and Barack Obama who support the status quo and do not challenge racism in any way significant enough to be threatening.<sup>12</sup>

This statement, ‘significant enough to be threatening’, is extraordinary. What does Di Angelo mean by this? That, in order, to dispel racism suggests that a display of threat is required? This alarmist language strikes revolutionary and has manifested itself into being what is portrayed by some of the coverage of BLM supporters assaulting and attacking those who do not support their cause. In a similar vein, football pundits in the UK often use a sort of paramilitary language to incite radical and heightened emotions during major football matches, a seminal example being that between the Celtics and the Rangers. Such matches often induce significant strains of violence, an unfortunate by-product seemingly unique to football (soccer).

Why does Di Angelo harp on about white people controlling most of industry in the United States?

For that matter, why would any mathematically adept person suggest that an equal number of white and people of colour should universally sit on the boards of industry considering that, according to the 2019 US Census Bureau, non-Hispanic whites represent 63 percent of the population? Moreover, in states like Oregon, only 2 percent of the population are African American while white people represent 85 percent. Idaho is a measly half a percent African American! The only enclave in the US which has more African Americans than white is the District of Columbia with Mississippi following far behind at second place at 37 percent. It frustrates me when these data are not taken into account when researching representation of people of colour in positions of power. Robin Di Angelo conveniently ignores this and does not make any mention of factual data, for example, that of the top one hundred cities in the United States, more than one-third have black mayors. Surprise, surprise! This is as expected

considering that more than sixty percent of the US population is white. Either Di Angelo is mathematically clueless, or she is pushing the narrative that enough is never enough. To add insult to injury, those people of colour who are seemingly not pushing the narrative of Di Angelo's reasoning are given derisory names like 'coconuts', white on the inside, brown on the outside. Classic examples include Candace Owens, Terrence K Williams, Coleman Hughes and Larry Elder. Another layer of 'demonisation' is placed upon any so-called 'coconut' if they are Trump supporters of course.

Jumping ahead in the next section discussing white supremacy, I challenge the reader to independently research the percentage of whites that represent various positions of power as Di Angelo states in her book. There is a bullet point list in her book of around fifteen or so demographics ranging from US governors to full time college professors of which, against each, Di Angelo puts a percentage figure of who is white, figures which are grossly inflated. I guarantee you that the results are strikingly different when these are researched independently. With each result Di Angelo picks, she cites a far greater percentage of whites than what is reported from a variety of third-party sources.

As for white supremacy, I can say that it absolutely exists. I have personally been a witness to it during my high-school years in Colorado when I was researching Soviet history and communism, subjects which I took an interest in. While typing up a report on an Apple IIe on school grounds, a group of other classmates began to cluster around pester me accusing me of being a communist and whatnot. They further went on to suggest that the white race is the superior race and that I should be researching the writings of Adolf Hitler instead. I kid you not. This really happened! Now when Di Angelo presents racism as a 'structure' rather than a condition and that white supremacy is not an attribute of individual people but rather of overarching political, economic and social systems of domination<sup>13</sup>, this sort of rhetoric is totally lost on me.

The fact of the matter is that what those bunch of individuals accusing me of being a communist while condoning the actions of the KKK is white supremacy plain and simple. The so-called modern definition of white supremacy which authors like Di Angelo want to implement is damaging because it waters down the downright evil nature of real white supremacy. Perhaps more disturbing is the deliberate intention of making today's modern definition of white supremacy just as evil as the traditional one because we have now lost a term for the 'real bad' white supremacy.

There is another form of white supremacy, or more correctly, *racial* supremacy and it is derived from those who disapprove of *miscegenation*, or simply put, the interbreeding of people from different races. Miscegenation could, perhaps, be our best hope for bringing everyone together from the racial perspective but alas, there is a staggering twenty percent of Americans who disapprove of miscegenation with most not explaining their reasons why. It is a topic for another article but I find it a shame that one out of every five people are against one of the great wins of civil rights cases, *Love vs Virginia (1967)*, in which the US Supreme Court made it legal to have interracial marriages.

Later in the section discussing white supremacy, Di Angelo cites a chap called Mills who states that socialism, capitalism, fascism and other political systems are identified and studied, but then states that the power of white supremacy is drawn from its invisibility.<sup>14</sup>

What is not clear from this statement is if he is suggesting white supremacy as being predominantly white as a percentage of the population rather than white supremacy in the traditional ‘evil’ sense. Either way, the statement is vague and does not hold much in the way of value as to be useful in terms of context or otherwise.

Di Angelo then proceeds to deliberate on her ‘white racial frame’ discourse in which she relates to how the white community circulates and reinforces racial messages positioning whites as being superior<sup>15</sup>. For example, she discusses how the average white people from the age of five are indoctrinated into a primarily white environment and being exposed to predominantly white events and figures such as Columbus Day and Disney movies and being subjected to belittling people of colour through products like Aunt Jemima’s syrup and Uncle Ben’s rice.

Much of the woke brigade who espouses the denouncing of the white racial frame go the extra mile to destroy it by pressuring various companies and industries to forego or change any form of branding which could suggest any idea of belittling a person of colour. Other actions include putting pressure on media streaming companies to revoke any material which may lead to the ridicule of people of colour such as the infamous withdrawal of the movie, *Gone with the Wind* by Netflix earlier this year, along with many others. This is often the case of knee-jerk overreaction sparked by the voice of a militant and angry few, most of which are not directly affected but rather gain satisfaction by

fooling themselves that they are bettering themselves by virtue signalling to others.

There are many people of colour who are far more offended by this behaviour but often any attempt for them to express their disdain openly is quashed without hesitation by the woke few who rebut that they are not *a true* person of colour but rather, possess the skin of one. This crazy statement, or that in a similar vein, was made repeatedly by so many enraged on social media when the charges of murder against the police officers were dismissed by a black judge on the tragic accidental shooting of Breona Taylor, a black female medical worker.

Further on in Di Angelo's 'white racial frame' section, she goes on to say that most white people almost always had white teachers.<sup>16</sup>

This is most likely true considering that, despite the percentage of black teachers being increased by 150 percent over the last three decades, the overwhelming majority of white teachers today is nearly a staggering ninety percent of the total. I remember having only one black schoolteacher by the name of Mrs. Watson during high school English class, and believe you me, she was an exceptionally good one having a flair for being a real pedant for grammar. It is striking how different the disparities are between black and white ratios of schoolteachers as compared to, say, police officers and city mayors. Despite the numerous articles on the Internet stating the fact that there are hardly any black teachers, there seems to be no glaring reason as to why this is. Is it because it is more difficult for people of colour to become teachers or is it because a fewer percentage want to be? Such questions can be elusive such as the one often asked in my own fields of engineering and IT why there is a considerable under-representation of women. Moreover, reflecting back on my schoolteachers, most of my science and math teachers were men and most foreign language and English teachers were women. Go figure. Society cannot force more black people to become schoolteachers if they choose not to, but I agree with Di Angelo on this one that a better representation of people of colour could be beneficial. However, if it means avidly pushing greater representation by making it easier for a person of colour to become a schoolteacher, much like the 2019 announcement by University Technology Sydney to offer 'gender points' to make it easier for women to enter the field of engineering, I fear that this could have repercussions based on the overall standards of quality.

Throughout the book, Di Angelo cites examples of mannerisms that white people might or might not exhibit in the company of people of colour. For example, she lists six bullet points that white people, in the company of people of colour, are racially conscious of behaving any of the below ways<sup>17</sup>:

- 1) Acting overly nice
- 2) Avoiding contact
- 3) Mimicking “black mannerisms and speech”
- 4) Being careful not to use racial terms or labels
- 5) Using code words to talk negatively about people of colour
- 6) Occasional violence directed at people of colour

To some extent, Di Angelo has a point. However, would this not apply to any group of people? After all, one is hardly going to feel comfortable by goose-stepping in front of a group of Jewish people, are they? Astrologers are famed for this style of reasoning by making anything fit for any situation. Read someone else’s star sign, but not your own, and see if it applies to you. Most of the time, it will.

In the last paragraph of the same section, Di Angelo then grandly states that racism’s adaptations over time are more sinister than concrete rules such as Jim Crow resulting in a society that *refuses to know*, a term she classifies as being a pillar of white fragility<sup>18</sup>. A pillar no less!

With no context to back this up, this is blatant hyperbole. Let us look at the converse of this statement. To suggest that white people living in the era of Jim Crow are more willing to *acknowledge to know* than today, is ridiculous, unfair, and even dangerous. Does the author not make any concession at all to the progress that has been made with racial equality during the last fifty years or so? Sure, there are still many injustices that happen to this very day due to racial injustice, but to state that it has got worse without giving context is farcical.

Di Angelo is very selective in her choice of analogies and stories to fit the narrative that people of colour are unduly represented in everyday life. Take for example when she rambles on about her daily life and her race as being ‘unremarkable’ when she recounts famous people including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Robert E Lee, Amelia Earhart, Susan B Anthony, John Glenn, Sally Ride and Louisa May Alcott<sup>19</sup>.

Di Angelo complains that they are overwhelmingly white. Well of course they are! She rambled off only white heroes and heroines. Why she chose Robert E Lee is beyond belief. Even as kids, we remember this is the general that led the South, of which, many of us know, supported slavery, an atrocious episode in US history. What about the heroes and heroines of people of colour? What about MLK? What about Scott Joplin, of ragtime fame, who in my book wrote the best American piano music ever? Much of the music I listened to were performed by people of colour--Stevie Wonder, Earth Wind & Fire, Bob Marley and so on—probably more, to be honest, than those performed by white people. As for Di Angelo's choice of Sally Ride? I had to look her up because I didn't know who she was!

Not much later in the same section, she alludes to one of her stories in which she approached two gatherings, one of which consisted of people of colour and the other being of white people, having a pot-luck picnic in a public park. She was looking for her friend but sensed anxiety when she considered she might have to enter the all-black group but sensed relief when her friend was in the all-white group<sup>20</sup>.

Di Angelo might have a point if she was raised in a predominantly white population. For example, I went to a predominantly white school in the US and yes, various groups of people, did tend to cluster together whether they belonged to the jocks, the goths, the eccentrics, and, dare I say it, the ugly. It is an unfortunate facet of life that humans tend to group together, and it is even more unfortunate that racial groups tend to group together as well. Being very much a loner, plagued with acne and not very much interested in sports during my school years, I was excluded from the dominant jock society. You know, the club where the guys had all the girls they wanted. But those years were long ago and having gained adulthood, I held no qualms with entering groups of people who were not like my own or shared different interests, especially one which is racial based. Furthermore, I found it a positive experience and more interesting to join a group who are different to me. I find it disappointing that a grown adult could find anxiety by entering a group of people who are not of the same racial category. Perhaps this is why those who possess reason and rational thinking have no qualms with debating against their opponents whereas those who do not often find it easier and safer to 'shout' behind a cloak of anonymity without fear of rebuttal.

The author has a short section in her book about freedom of movement for people of colour, or what I more likely infer from her being the lack of. Within this section, she recounts a story—the author is not short on stories—where she and her friend wanted to get away for a relaxing weekend. The author suggested that somewhere in Idaho might be nice, but her black friend was petrified of going there in case she might stumble on the white supremacists<sup>21</sup>.

Earlier on in the article, I mentioned that Idaho has the lowest percentage of people of colour, of which black Americans represent only two percent of. Gauging from the author's dogged nature of being sensitive and aware of people of colour in her presence, Idaho seems a peculiar choice to bring a black friend. Sure, this could be a momentary lapse in her thinking, and anyone could be excused for this, but Idaho? Frankly, I would not find it entirely relaxing to be invited by my Saudi friend to vacation in Mecca. I would find it very interesting and I would love to go, but relaxing? No. We all have a licence to be a little creative in our storytelling, but could this be taking it a little further than necessary? By the way, there is nothing wrong with Idaho per se. Nothing more wrong with Idaho than any other state, except that it does probably have plenty of fresh air and wilderness to enjoy.

Immediately in the next section, Di Angelo starts focussing on the lack of diversity in the literary world citing famous authors like Dickens, Dostoevsky, Twain, Austin and Shakespeare—all white authors—getting all the attention<sup>22</sup>. Di Angelo then quotes authors which are celebrated during Black History Month like Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Amy Tan and Sandra Cisneros. However, when the celebratory month ends, they are forgotten, and the old die-hard white authors return to the limelight.

To be fair, it does not take much effort to find out that fewer black writers are well-known than white writers. However, what the reader may have noted above is that all the white authors above come from a much older time, with perhaps, the exception of Dostoevsky. Take classical music. Far more people are going to know about Beethoven, Bach and Mozart rather than 20<sup>th</sup> century composers like Scriabin, Shostakovich and Aaron Copland. Like any age, a lot of material, whether it is music, film or literature, gets published but only the best of it survives throughout the centuries. There is plenty of literature written by people of colour and, like literature written by white people, there is good and bad literature. It is fact that Europe, especially during its period of Enlightenment, enjoyed a vast wealth of art creation along with the ability to

record it for future enjoyment, more so than any other culture during this time. And the predominant of those who contributed to this culture were generally those of white people.

In Di Angelo's section about white solidarity<sup>23</sup>, she makes it out that white solidarity is, somehow, a conspiracy, a secret society of white people who have a tacit agreement to remain silent and not to break rank. This, of course, morphs into the popular anti-racist slogan of the year, 'Silence is Violence', which has been extensively used by activists to bully others into following their cause. The premise that one should *not* be silent if a friend or family says something hurtful to another is commonly accepted with people holding moral values but to *accuse* those who are not actively fighting a cause is dictatorial. Such actions are contrary to freedom of thought and expression and is, at best, Orwellian to say the least.

Interestingly, in the next section, The Good Old Days, Di Angelo, probably unintentionally, emphasises how *bad* the so-called Good Old Days were<sup>24</sup>. She runs through an extensive list in one long paragraph of bad things from slavery and Jim Crow to lynching and Chinese exclusion laws. I think the intention for her writing this section is to throw criticism to those who miss the so-called 'good old days', whereas in fact, she openly highlights the immense progress that has been made during the last several decades or more.

In the same section, she then, quite wrongly suggests that the white working class always hold top positions within blue-collar fields such as those in the emergency services. Perhaps Di Angelo should look at the demographics of police chiefs in the United States who are people of colour. However, immediately after, she does produce a reasonably accurate portrayal of the overall distribution of wealth in a bullet list but somehow, this does not seem entirely relevant in this book given the fact that some of the wealthiest men on the planet *are* people of colour with respect to their citizenry. As pointed out earlier, the book is directed towards the United States in general, but as she included the world in this list, it would be remiss for me not to point out that the Sultan of Brunei, not a white person, is immensely wealthy.

Di Angelo then discusses the problem of 'white flight', where white people move away from a neighbourhood because of concern of growing crime because of an influx of people of colour moving in<sup>25</sup>.

The concept of ‘white flight’ is not untrue and Di Angelo is partially correct in pointing out that census data and police department crime statistics does not necessarily hold true with the association that neighbourhoods with a greater percentage of people of colour see an increase in crime. However, the term ‘white flight’ is misleading because ‘white flight’ is certainly not limited to white people. Wealthy people tend to move away to locations where they can afford to and, more often than not, these locations tend to have lower rates of crime. It may be more accurate to redefine the term ‘white flight’ to ‘wealth flight’.

The core of the book is reached when Di Angelo runs through several bullet points characterising those who are deemed *colour-blind*. She then runs through a *further* set of bullet points to those who she coins as *colour-celebrate*<sup>26</sup>.

Either way, she makes the rules and in no way can you be seen as not being racist if you are either colour-blind or colour-celebrate. This leaves one in a rather ‘sticky’ situation here, because it’s damned if you do and damned if you don’t. Let’s review some of the bullet points in her *colour-blind* list.

**‘I was taught to treat everyone else the same.’** Obviously, you should do.

**‘I don’t see colour.’** Well. I don’t know about you, but I couldn’t care less if the person I spoke to is a brilliant turquoise blue or a bright magenta.

**‘I don’t care if you are pink, purple, or polka-dotted.’** Ah ha! The author pre-empted my answer above trying to scupper any ‘escape’ route I might find in her bizarre world of who is deemed a racist or not.

**‘Race doesn’t have any meaning to me.’** Why should it?

**‘My parents weren’t racist, so that is why I am not racist’.** OK. That is meaningless because I have to admit that my father is a little racist at times, but it changes who he is racist against on a regular basis.

**‘Everyone struggles, but if you work hard’.** Not sure what this has to do with colour-blind but those with a silver spoon in their mouth certainly do not struggle as hard, although family pressures can be just as tough. This is irrespective of race.

**‘Focussing on race is what divides us.’** It is certainly *one* of the many things which divide us, yes.

**‘If people are respectful to me, I am respectful to them, regardless of race.’**

For Christ’s sake, yes. Sure, if someone is being nice to me, I make sure that I look very carefully as to what race they are from. Seriously?

**‘Children today are so much more open’.** Children are *always* open until we poison them with ideas of identity politics and critical race theory.

**‘I’m no racist; I’m from Canada.’** Well, good for you. Do you all like maple syrup and shoot polar bears on holiday?

The second list of colour-celebrate terms are those that the author claim act as a sort of excuse for being not racist. In other words, you cannot use any of the below as a rebuttal if someone calls you a racist. These are as follows.

**‘I work in a very diverse environment’**

**‘I have people of colour in my family’**

**‘I was in the military’.** What is the author talking about here?

**‘I used to live in New York/Hawaii’.** This is getting worse.

**‘I was in the Peace Corps’.** Huh?

There are more in this list, but it gets so absurd and irrelevant.

First and foremost, Di Angelo is so focussed on racial awareness, one could deem her being highly racist herself. In her chapter on Anti-Blackness, she makes reference to internalising people from various cultures whether they be Asian, Indigenous, Chinese, Japanese and so on<sup>27</sup>.

In other words, I gather from what she wrote is that when she holds a conversation with a someone who is from another culture or race, the main thought process she has is how she should converse with a person from this race or culture rather than the actual subject matter of the original conversation. For example, in my university days, the chaps I studied with in my halls of residence were predominantly Black Muslim (from Sudan) and Sikh (from Kenya). Sure, I knew what they were allowed or not allowed to do. The Sudanese guys didn’t drink beer. They didn’t care if I drunk beer. They smoked liked a chimney. I didn’t and I didn’t care if they did. The Sikh guy always carried this wicked knife and had his turban on. We didn’t care about any of this stuff. We went out to restaurants, studied and great fun. If Di Angelo’s intent is

for people to first check out someone's race beforehand and ensure that they are compartmentalised and treated different, she is doing this very well to make society more racially divisive.

Later in the chapter, Di Angelo, as so often, comes out with improbable facts. For example, she states that a majority of whites, in both the expression of their beliefs and the practice of their lives, do not want to integrate with blacks<sup>28</sup>. She claims to have got the data from the American Sociological Foundation from a 2015 study. Perhaps I have been unsuccessful, but I have not found data claiming this striking statistic. Sure, there are many publications, most of which are left-wing like *Vox* or from many university institutions who claim this, but where is the hard data?

The book gets truly weird and downright uncaring when we get to Di Angelo's discourse on distracting 'the conversation'. In one of her stories when Di Angelo conducted a diversity session, a white woman went back to her desk not feeling well when she received feedback from some of her statements. Her workmates were suspecting she was getting a heart-attack and, quite rightly, attention was diverted to her. After all, having a heart attack is something not to be taken lightly. However, Di Angelo states this. '...all attention was immediately focussed back onto her [because of her possible heart attack] and away from the engagement with the impact she had had on the people of colour.'<sup>29</sup> What kind of morals does this author have?

She goes even further when she talks about white woman's tears in Chapter 11. She states that tears that are driven by white guilt are self-indulgent. She comes up with a story when a white woman, during a story-telling session of cross-racial discussions, started to cry. Apparently, according to Di Angelo, this is disturbing and insulting for people of colour and Di Angelo asked the woman to leave immediately and cry by herself. I'm sorry folks, but this is nuts and completely insane.

I am glad that I had read the book, and in many ways, I hope that others get a chance to read it as well. Why you may ask?

Let's first state that critical race theory, white privilege and identity politics did not start with Di Angelo. Well back during the 1970s, these studies were gaining ground through authors like Judith Butler. California, in particular, San Francisco, which could be considered as one of the main birthplaces of these ideologies.

I recently re-watched a rather little known comedy-drama movie called [Serial \(1980\)](#)—noteworthy for bad-ass Christopher Lee’s role as ‘Skull’, a gay hells-angel type rider—which, to me, was a first in rounding up all these whacky and crazy ideologies of which California is so well-known for. Cults, feminism, identity politics, zany spiritualism, it’s all there in this film.

These ideologies have been with us for decades but more recent writers like Di Angelo and Ibram X. Kendi—author of *How to be an Anti-Racist*—have brought them into the limelight. I believe that reading these books provides a good insight into the hidden vaults of ideologies which many have heard of before but not really sure what they are. Unfortunately, many are not prepared to read these books, especially those who critique these ideologies through the words of others, particularly on social media or through general hearsay and memes. What I am trying to convey is that if more of us read what these ideologies are all about, then maybe more of us might take on a more critical view of what they represent.

The book is a little dry and takes some time to get through properly. I read it thoroughly the first time whilst taking notes. Before writing this critique, I thought I would be far more scathing than I would have been, but having gone through my notes and re-reading some of the passages, I found some of which that was new and interesting material. But by and large, my learnings on critical race theory are so far out of kilter to what seems logical and rational.

What makes the book unpalatable (to me) even verging on ‘dangerous’ may be attributed to those that are *au fait* with critical race theory wishing to expound on it and to spread its ideologies to the masses. For example, it is unlikely that many supporters of some of the ideologies put forward by some of the recent movements re-sharing simplistic memes on social media such as Black Lives Matter would be willing, or, dare I say it, even capable, of understanding the original material set out by Di Angelo and other authors of critical race theory like Kendi. To take an analogy, those who have read *Mein Kampf* would have been highly unlikely to be the ones who were prowling the streets and causing disruption and violence. However, there were a relatively highly intelligent and nefarious few who used such pieces of work to their own advantage by extracting, dumbing down and re-broadcasting the ideologies to cause disruption, violence and chaos to instigate a revolution.

Di Angelo has capitalised enormously on white fragility and critical race theory ideologies in her writings and diversity courses. What is tragically sad in all this is that she is supporting an ideology which discards the notion of integrating people of all races together. If anything, Di Angelo's book and others similar to it merely create more divisiveness in how we treat people of different races.

<sup>1</sup> Author's note para 5

<sup>2</sup> Author's note para 6

<sup>3</sup> Author's note, What about Multiracial People? Para 4

<sup>4</sup> Chap 1, Our Opinions are Uninformed, Para 2

<sup>5</sup> Chap 1, Our Opinions are Uninformed, Para 4

<sup>6</sup> Chap 2, The Perception of Race, Para 2

<sup>7</sup> Chap 2, Racism, Para 6

<sup>8</sup> Chap 2, Racism, Para 7

<sup>9</sup> Chap 2, Racism, Para 10

<sup>10</sup> Chap 2, Racism, Para 12

<sup>11</sup> Chap 2, Racism, Para 17

<sup>12</sup> Chap 2, Whiteness as a position of status, Para 11

<sup>13</sup> Chap 2, White Supremacy, Para 1

<sup>14</sup> Chap 2, White Supremacy, Para 4

<sup>15</sup> Chap 2, White Racial Frame

<sup>16</sup> Chap 2, White Racial Frame, Para 4

<sup>17</sup> Chap 3, Cultural Racism, Para 8

<sup>18</sup> Chap 3, Cultural Racism, past para

<sup>19</sup> Chap 4, Belonging, Para 4

<sup>20</sup> Chap 4, Belonging, Para 6

<sup>21</sup> Chap 4, Freedom of Movement, Para 2

<sup>22</sup> Chap 4, Just People, Para 2

<sup>23</sup> Chap 4, White Solidarity, Para 1

<sup>24</sup> Chap 4, The Good Old Days, Para 1

<sup>25</sup> Chap 4, White Racial Innocence, Para 3

<sup>26</sup> Chap 5, Para 18

<sup>27</sup> Chap 6, Para 2

<sup>28</sup> Chap 6, Para 12

<sup>29</sup> Chap 8