

# **WHITE FRAGILITY**

**How do we talk to white people about race?**

# Origins of U.S. Racism

**“All men are created equal”**

- Killed indigenous people & stole their land
- Imported and enslaved Africans
- Introduced the term “white” - late 1600’s
- Denoted “race” on the census - 1790
- Abolished slavery - 1865, then policies legalized racist exclusions
- Race science driven by social and economic interests became the norm

## **Pillars of Whiteness**

- **Only bad people are racist**
- **Racism is discrete acts of individuals**
- **Disregard of complex, interconnected racist systems**
- **There are biological and genetic differences between “races”**

## **Consequences of white beliefs**

- **White success is due to merit; others don't work hard enough**
- **Failure to explore our unconscious biases**
- **Denial that systemic racism exists**
- **Continue to benefit from our privilege**

To say “**people just need to treat everyone the same and respect each other**” invalidates the experience of a black person and closes the conversation to learning.

## **Society's Default**

**Racism, sexism, other forms of oppression continue when a racial group's prejudice is backed by legal authority and institutional control.**

**Women could only gain rights if white men granted them**

**They denied white women the vote until 1920**

**They denied black women the vote until 1965**

## **Systemic Racism**

**Basic RIGHTS consistently afforded to only white people.**

- Whites don't see this as racism
- Whites don't like to think they had unearned advantages
- Triggers a protective response - **white fragility**

## **WHITE SUPREMACY- Narrow View of what that means**

**Historical perceptions:** beating, burning, lynching of black people

**Present Perception is still “Bad People” focused:**

- radical hate groups
- protesting removal of Confederate memorials
- storming the Capital with Nazi and Confederate flags
- attacking black people, Asians, LGBTQ+ etc.



## **WHITE SUPREMACY- a structure, not an event**

- **Assumed superiority of people perceived as white**
- **A political, economic and social system of domination**
- **Disseminated through all forms of legislation and media**
- **Children “learn” from family, TV and media accounts, social interactions, books, and school**
- **General ignorance of contributions of other ethnic groups**

## **Language of White nationalists to distance themselves from “racism”**

- **Need to shut down immigration**
- **End globalism**
- **Fight affirmative action**
- **Reverse discrimination**

# RACISM WITHOUT RACISTS - the “color blind mentality”

## Preventing the work we need to do - Aversive Racism

- Not acknowledging our bias
- Getting defensive
- Using coded terms: urban, underprivileged, diverse, poor neighborhood

Underachieving, **safe neighborhood**,

# Home Appraisal



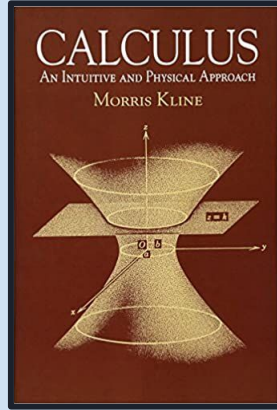
**With a Black Owner: \$472,000**

**With a White Owner: \$750,000**

# Unconscious or Implicit Bias



# Sexism - Relating to Male Dominated Society and Privilege



- Bias
- Patriarchal Church
- Belonging

House Freedom Caucus -  
White Male Power









## **Shared experiences of White Privilege**

- **Visibility**
- **Belonging**
- **Freedom from the burden of race**
- **Freedom of movement**
- **The white norm - perceived self-worth**
- **White solidarity**
- **The “good old days”**
- **“Traditional” family values and family composition**
- **Reinforced by media and the arts**
- **Sense of entitlement to all the above**

## **2009 Research study of 283 white children**

- **6-7 year olds discriminated against black children whether an adult was in the room or not**
- **9-10 year olds discriminated against black children only when no adult was present (they learned to hide their racism)**

## **Have you heard these?**

- *Race has nothing to do with it!*
- *Focusing on race is what divides us*
- *Black addicts are criminals*  
*(White addicts have an illness)*
- *Affirmative action is racism against whites*
- *All lives matter; blue lives matter*
- *That wasn't my intention; what I meant was ...*
- *You people ....*
- *Stop playing the race card*

**And as Martin Luther King observed:**

*“With whites it is ‘subsidies’; with blacks it is ‘welfare’*

## **White “RULES” of receiving feedback:**

- Use proper tone
- Share privately
- Don't highlight my racial privilege
- Acknowledge my good intentions
- You misunderstood me

## **Resulting effects of these “RULES”:**

- Obscures racism and protects white dominance.
- Silences feedback.

**White Women's Tears (fragility)** often hijack the conversation.  
**White Men's Fragility** shows up as dominance and intimidation.

## **Behaviors of White Fragility**

- Control the conversation
- Play devil's advocate
- Proclaim the simple answer
- Outraged cry "reverse discrimination"
- "Race card"
- Silence or hostile body language
- Intellectualize - "I recommend this book.."
- Correct the analysis of POC and white women
- Pompously explain away racism and experiences of POC

# **Struggles of navigating white fragility as a person of color ...**

- **Avoids being a threat or troublemaker**
- **Impedes the development of friendships**
- **Blocks being honest and open**

**STOPPING OUR RACIST PATTERNS MUST BE MORE IMPORTANT  
THAN CONVINCING OTHERS WE DON'T HAVE THEM.**

## **Essential Antiracist Rules (when power is unequal)**

- **How you give me feedback is irrelevant; I need it!**
- **I will be humble - I will work on handling it**
- **THANK YOU!**
- **I know I have blind spots and investments in racism**
- **I benefit from the system and need to interrupt it**
- **I'm taking time to work on my racism.**
- **I will focus on the message and look within**
- **I will use kindness, clarity and courage to challenge racism**
- **I will focus on the *how* and not *if* my racism is manifest**