

30-Day Anti-Racism Challenge Blog



Starting Sunday April 4th, on the 53rd anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Geoff and the other program leadership will be posting here every day as they embark on a 30-Day Anti-Racism Challenge. Some posts will be longer, some shorter, but we welcome you to join us in this experience either through thought and reflection or by taking the challenge yourselves.

For those of you interested in completing the Challenge, either alongside your residency leadership team or at your own pace in the coming weeks to months, you can find the full Challenge on the Heartbeat here:

https://medschool.cuanschutz.edu/docs/librariesprovider60/im-heartbeat/images-pdf/30-day-anti-racism-challenge.pdf?sfvrsn=71ee6bba_0

Day #1: Understanding White Privilege Reflection by Dr. Geoff Connors

Yesterday evening, I started the 30-Day Anti-Racist Challenge set forth by the Department of Medicine. The April 4th assignment was to watch and reflect upon a talk by the author of the book “White Fragility”, Dr. Robin DiAngelo.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7mzj0cVL0Q>

As a White, straight, cis man of above-average height, race and other outward-defining features are not something I am forced to think about every day. I do think about them frequently, in the context of my role as a doctor (in relation to many of my patients) and in my role leading a diverse residency program. But I do not think about it *every* day and, because of that mix of societally privileged characteristics, *I don't have to if I don't want to*. That fact alone is an unearned, unique position that needs to be named and noted and factored into my decision and actions. My race has a profound effect on my everyday existence; that is obvious. This talk brought that into focus in a way I have contemplated

previously, but without the language to do so as deeply as I would like. My other thoughts after watching the talk:

I became comfortable with the term, “White Fragility”. I have to be honest, when I first saw this book title several years ago, my initial reaction was pain. I didn’t want to be lumped into a group “white”, certainly not when it is associated with something like “fragility”. I initially recoiled against the idea of being lumped at all, to be honest. What I came to understand is that this feeling, the pain of being lumped into a negative category based on the color of your skin, is part of the point of the title. I also came to understand that the fragility being discussed is part personal (and therefore personally painful) but also part societal – it references the tenuous and fraught nature of the societal convention ‘race’ and how fragile and mutable that concept really is. In this sense, the “fragility” around race is good.

It was not lost on me (nor on the speaker, who acknowledges this right away) that I was listening to a White woman talk about race. It was especially not lost on me that I was starting a 30-Day Anti-Racism Challenge this way. Maybe this White woman can be heard by White people as a ‘gateway speaker’ to talks by non-White academics. Maybe this was one more example of the depth of the problem. I’m not sure, but it caught my attention.

I was struck by the following quotes and/or concepts from Dr. DiAngelo:

What does it mean to be white in a society that claims race to be meaningless but is profoundly separated by race?

As a white person, I was socialized to see race as something “others had”. I didn’t have race, because I was white. I was able to live my life without thinking about white as a race.

Racism is a system of unequal power, and one we are all part of.

I have lived in segregation much of my own life. Think about your own life growing up.

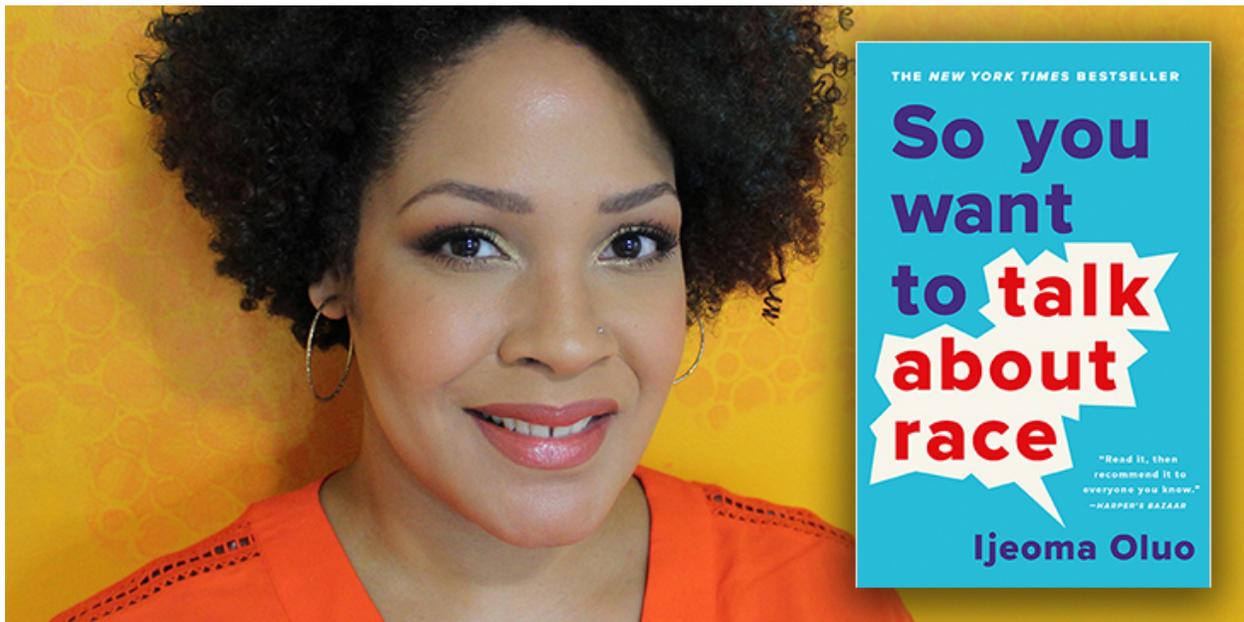
Have you considered that surrounding yourself with only white people is a loss? That not having people of color around you was a true and tangible loss.

I didn’t design this system and I don’t want it. I’m not wracked with guilt about the segregation in which I grew up in, but I am responsible for acknowledging it and changing it going forward.

There is no neutral space in this discussion. Inaction is a form of action.

I came away from this talk with a deeper appreciation on race as a White man. These are my immediate-after thoughts:

- I will engage with this challenge and this struggle well beyond the 30 days with authenticity.
- I am White and that is a defining feature in my life.
- I will recognize my blind spots and, since that's not even close to possible by definition, I will be open to others who point them out to me.
- I won't use my lack of conscious racism to fool me into thinking there are not unconscious things that affect my decisions and actions. To this end, I will be very conscious never to use terms, philosophies, and turns of phrase that take race and the power of racial minorities off the table (see discussions at 4:20 and 7:55 in the video). They are demeaning and non-productive.
- I will remember that this is a lifelong struggle.
- I appreciate even more today that time spent in self-segregation is self-imposed (and therefore self-correctable) and a loss compared to time that could be spent in a richer and more diverse environment. If I let any part of my life be segregated, it is on me to correct that situation for my own good and the good of those around me.
- I want my daughter to be better at this than I am. And I am willing to put in the work to turn that want into a reality.



Day #2: Start reading a book on being anti-racist to ground your learning
Reflection by Dr. Julia Limes

[7 Books on Anti-Racism 2020 | The Strategist | New York Magazine \(nymag.com\)](#)

The link for today goes to a list of 7 anti-racism books recommended by activists and authors. Many great options and certainly not an exhaustive list, but I decided to read "So You Want to Talk About Race" by Ijeoma Oluo this month. I want to do a deeper dive on how to have more effective conversations about race and find my blind spots in this topic. The book choice was sealed when I read an article today talking about how our field avoids using the term racism - and how one physician was asked to take it out of multiple article titles by journal editors: [Opinion | The health-care industry doesn't want to talk about this single word - The Washington Post](#). My initial reaction was I would not be that editor, would not be that colleague, but that defensive reaction is usually a clue I actually need to reflect on ways I have been that colleague and what I can do differently moving forward.

3 reflections after reading the first few chapters:

First, I've been thinking about this excerpt and how I can put this in practice in conversations with family and friends, responses to micro and macroaggressions I see, and responding to and talking about events like the dismissal of the Tulane Med-Peds program director.

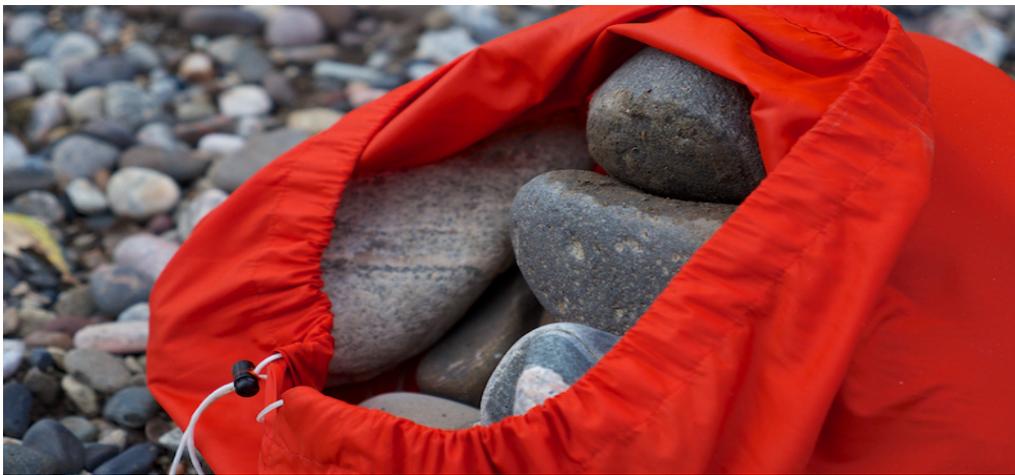
"Tying racism to its systemic causes and effects will help others see the important difference between systemic racism and anti-white bigotry. In addition, the more practice you have at tying individual racism to the system that gives it power, the more you will be able to see all the ways in which you can make a difference....Yes, you can definitely report your racist coworker to HR, but you can also ask your company management what processes they have in place to minimize racial bias in their hiring process, you can ask for more diversity in management and cultural sensitivity training for staff, and you can ask what procedures they have in place to handle allegations of racial discrimination."

Second, the title of the third chapter is certainly one of my fears - "What if I talk about race wrong?" The point she makes is - I am going to! And I already have! But I should not let that stop me from talking about race and racism. She goes through basic tips of how to engage in conversations and what to do and consider if the situation goes off the rails, which were helpful as I reflected on prior conversations and plan for future ones.

Last reflection - why read a book? My personal reminder for why I need to read more anti-racism books and take an in-depth look at subjects I thought I understood:

A few years ago, I read the book "The Color of Law" by Richard Rothstein. It's a well written, well researched history book about how government policies led to racial neighborhood segregation, making the case that it was not just *de facto* segregation from prejudice, societal discrimination, and things like redlining but unconstitutional, *de jure* segregation - segregation by law and public policy. It grounded my learning in this area and led to a much deeper understanding of a very significant, important topic.

While I was reading the book, one of my recurring thoughts was "how did I not know this?" I loved history in school, read a lot of history books, took a lot of history classes, paid attention in those classes. Mr. Rothstein must have known many would have the same thoughts and at the end of the book, he included what a few of the major American history textbooks say about neighborhood segregation in northern cities. My high school history book: "African Americans found themselves forced into segregated neighborhoods." What we teach in school is a whole other discussion, but for me, it was just a striking reminder that my understanding of a subject can be incredibly superficial, or just wrong. And it's my responsibility to recognize and rectify that, and when I don't recognize it, hopefully have the people in my circle to point it out and the humility to hear it.



**Day #3: Things You Don't Have to think about BIPOC Think About Every Day
(Reading: White Privilege – Unpacking the Invisible Backpack)
Reflection (“Ode to Missy Elliott”) by Dr. Yasmin Sacro**

(Today's article cannot be reprinted directly but can be linked out to here:
<https://nationalseedproject.org/Key-SEED-Texts/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack>)

To be transparent, I specifically chose today's challenge to reflect on as one of the few faculty of color in IMRP Leadership. I wanted to see what the reading would say about what I have to think about every day. There's a lot to potentially unpack. Let's address "the list" in the article.

Peggy McIntosh is very specific to introduce the list in her own autobiographical context: this is a list of conditions (written in 1989) that when comparing herself as a White woman to her African American coworkers, they cannot count on. This list contains 26 statements of which some examples are:

“I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.”
“I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.”
“If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.”

Of these statements she feels her Black colleagues would not be able to agree. They are a list of “conditions of daily experience that I once took for granted.”

I am advised both before and after “the list” in the reading not to take it out of the author’s biographical context. But in order to meet the anti-racism challenge today, by golly, I have to.

12 of 26.

Of the 26 statements, 12 of them I went nope, that does not apply to me as an Asian woman. 12 of 26 are things I worry about as a person of color.

Let’s be fair that nowhere in the article does the author state, here are the things BIPOC people think about every day. More specifically, she centers her experience on her acknowledgement of her White privilege and what are the things she as a White person CAN count on, but her Black colleagues cannot count on. She also says, “*White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.*”

So (forgive me Missy Elliot) while I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it: if this challenge is to acknowledge what BIPOCs think about every day that White people don’t have to, then let’s not linger on the VIP passes that White privilege affords in the designer knapsack. Because I’m not totally focused on the special passes and provisions in the White person’s bag; but I’m worried about my own knapsack and how it is weighted down and will prevent me from proceeding or succeeding.

Let’s take the statements of the list in their contradictory form (super confusing because McIntosh often writes in double negatives!) and instead of each item being a special pass it becomes a weighted stone.

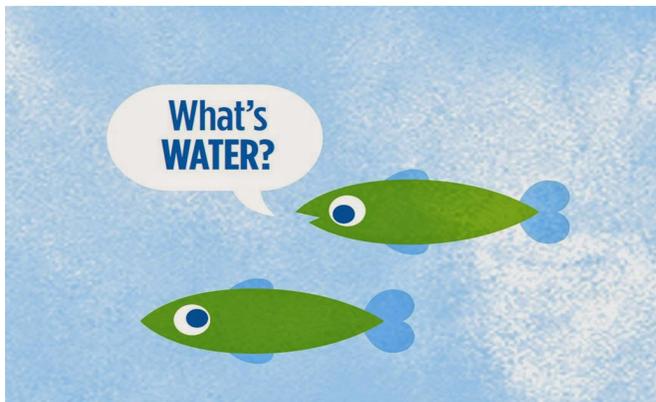
“I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location *will not* be neutral or pleasant to me.” Clunk. Stone in my knapsack.

“My children *will not* be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.” Clunk. Another weight in my knapsack.

“If my day, week, or year is going badly, I *must ask of* each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.” Clunk, clunk. This is a double sandbag for this BIPOC overthinker.

I don't blame McIntosh. She didn't title her article “Things BIPOC Worry About.” I think her analysis of viewing men's privilege and their obliviousness to it which in turn allows her to laterally see her own race privilege and obliviousness to it was super interesting. I really like her idea of using her own White “unearned advantage to weaken systems of unearned advantage” also as encouraging. I think the leap of centering this article and list that is viewed from White privilege is on the challenge creators' part. Yes, it is a good list of things BIPOC worry about, but then let's frame it in that way: frame it in the worry of BIPOC, and not the ease of the privileged. Let's see the perspective of the weighted knapsack and not the invisible one.

Let me also fully acknowledge that for people who are Black or other underrepresented minorities, their stones may be heavier and more numerous than mine; that the intersectionality afforded by a combination of stones can make the weight of the knapsack increase multi-fold. And that inevitably over time, the constant weight of that knapsack as it drags you down, as it drowns you, or even as it kneels on your neck – may remind you of a shackle. It almost makes you want to lose control.



Day 4: White Power and Privilege **Reflection by Dr. Ben Trefilek**

Today's session opens up with a simple analogy: as a young fish swims around in the water, a wise, old fish asks, “how is the water”, the young fish replies “what water?”. As a white, cis-gendered male, I have swum through a good portion of my life bathed in the water of white privilege; not noticing or recognizing the advantages it has granted me. This session is geared toward helping me notice the water.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G1qemhOfZHq-E0WK_W8nVe8aQX8lWHi-/view

First Assignment: Reflecting on the work of Tim Wise and Peggy McIntosh

Watching Tim's speech on the origin of the white race, my first thought was "this isn't what we were taught in history class" – drip, start to feel that water. Tim details how, in a young colony (the future United States), the elite, white class, developed the concept of the white race to pit poor white people against poor BIPOC. By inviting poor white people into the "exclusive club" of whiteness, the elite could control a poor working class. The concept of white race continued through slavery, indentured servitude, and continues today. "The History of America is the history of rich white men telling not-rich white people that their enemies are black and brown". Another splash of water.

Dr. Peggy McIntosh's article describes an invisible knapsack that I received as white male. While my BIPOC colleague's knapsacks are filled with rocks, weights, and knees; mine is filled with tools. It includes my passport, a birth certificate, a photo ID, visas, clothes, opportunities, education, leaders that look like me, and much more. This knapsack is tied to me at birth and cannot be taken off until systemic racism has ended. I cannot simply say, "I am no longer privileged, take my knapsack." Another splash.

Second Assignment: Reflecting on our own personal experience of white privilege

As I've started to notice the clear waters of my privilege, this second assignment became admittedly easy: how has white privilege helped my own life. Teaser alert: it has helped in nearly every aspect of my life.

1. I never had to worry that my name on my CV would prevent me from getting a call back from a job
2. I don't worry that a realtor wouldn't show me certain homes
3. I look around and see people that look like me in positions of leadership
4. I don't worry when I book an Airbnb that they may not accept my reservation based on my profile picture
5. I didn't worry about where my hands were when I was pulled over for speeding
6. I don't wear my white coat because I don't worry about being seen as anything but "the doctor"
7. I was never sent home from school for what I was wearing
8. I've never had to talk to my children about how to speak to the police
9. I will never be worried about being harassed for eating a Jimmy Johns sandwich (another teaser)

This list could go on and on, but I'd like to end on the most powerful example of white privilege I had growing up. As a second-year medical student, I was speeding down I-65, heading from Indianapolis to Chicago to get to a friend's birthday party. I explained to the police officer my situation and despite not having my driver's license, my insurance card, or my registration, he let me off with a simple warning. "Have fun at the party"

....During that same summer, my oldest brother, an adopted black male, was heading to dinner with two friends to celebrate his recent promotion in the Navy. As he locked the door to his car, two officers approached and accused him and his friends of smelling like marijuana. They harassed him for 45 minutes, including accusing him that the lettuce from his Jimmy John sandwich was marijuana – “if you know that this lettuce isn’t marijuana, that means you know what marijuana looks like”. My brother missed his dinner.

Today’s session was a great reminder to me; my white privilege is always there. It’s the knapsack of tools around my waist, it’s the water I swim through. It will not go away, but only by regularly acknowledging it, can I help dismantle the systems that provide it.



Day #5: Review the Guide to Allyship **Reflection by Dr. Dan Heppe**

I’d like to start out by saying that this is difficult. What I have written below might not seem very long or terribly insightful, but it didn’t come easy- I spent several hours reading the first few exercises including this one, writing, re-reading, and writing some more. I guess that is the point though, right? This is how I can make progress. I can only hope that one day it will be easier.

<https://guidetoallyship.com/>

I have read and reflected on this guide in the context of my thoughts and feelings provoked by the first few entries and associated reflections as well as the events of the last year and more. I am a tall, white male who grew up in a largely white middle class community and so using the framework of Peggy McIntosh, my invisible knapsack of privilege is particularly buoyant. Or, as reframed by Dr Sacro, my invisible knapsack is certainly not weighed down by any of the stones described. For the first couple decades of my life, this was not something that I thought much about. I certainly didn’t consider myself “racist” in the binary, good person/ bad person paradigm described by Dr DiAngelo, but I also did not dwell much on the fact that the *system*

automatically gives me privilege and power because I am white. My awareness and understanding of this fact have slowly evolved over the last couple of decades- accelerating somewhat over the last 5 years- but with much work left for me to do. So, how to go about doing that work?

In general, my personality is such that I like to feel like I am *doing* something, and I particularly like it when that something is concrete and specific. The idea of being an “ally” makes me feel like I am “doing” something. But the first thing here is for me to be aware that saying does not equal doing and that I have the privilege to discard this designation as it fits my purposes- so I really need to be careful how I think about this. I have to be sure that it is something that doesn’t just soothe my anxieties and guilt but actually leads to tangible change- in my behavior and hopefully others. This guide suggests several starting points to go about this process:

The first is to be self-aware that my words and actions are influenced by systemic oppression. How am I doing? How can I be better?

- Listening- this is hard. We focus on this as part of our clinical coach training- one thing we have our coaches do is just practice listening without interruption for 2 minutes- and then even more importantly not respond with anything other than a question. Try it! It’s really hard, I am pretty bad at it. I need to keep practicing this one.

-Be aware of my implicit biases- I have been fortunate enough to receive formal training on this, which has helped, but I am shocked on an almost daily basis the depth of my implicit bias- need to keep working on this one

-Do research on the struggle- yes, I am woefully underinformed- I have been chipping away at it, but this one is going to take a while

-Do the inner work to figure out how you participate in oppressive systems- this is really where I have been focusing my energies- it’s really about being honest with oneself but not necessarily having to face that outwardly in any immediate sense. Which brings me to the harder one:

-Do the outer work to figure out how to change those oppressive systems. This one is tougher- I think for me starting with using my privilege to amplify suppressed voices is an important start, but certainly not a finish.

Another place to focus is on acknowledging mistakes and improving on how I handle them. I have begun to think of these as falling into 2 general categories- mistakes that I realize I have made, either on my own or because someone has pointed them out to me, and mistakes that I don’t realize I have made. In reflecting on the former, I think I have done a fair job in acknowledging them and apologizing (more to follow on apologies...)- though like everything in life- with room to improve. It’s the latter- mistakes I don’t realize I am making- that are trickier. Many of these are more subtle and even more deeply rooted in the system of which I am a product and from which my actions result. This is tough. I have probably made or will make at least one such mistake in this reflection alone. How to identify these? To start with, going back to being a better listener, more open, combined with being less defensive when someone does point out a mistake- something I really struggle with at times- will likely help others feel more empowered to help me identify these mistakes and help me embrace them with more grace. But as this guide points out, I can’t expect to be shown all of these errors- so this is where

deliberately taking on my own education to further the depths of my understanding is crucial (see #7 from the guide). Then reflecting on my past actions, thoughts and behaviors in the context of that new understanding.

Apologies- what drew my attention most from the guide is that even when they are heartfelt, timely, and appropriately reflective they may not result in the closure that I am hoping for. This doesn't make them any less important, but I have to be consciously aware that the person I am apologizing to may not necessarily forgive me. The suggestion not to shame or pressure someone into an acceptance but rather focusing on closure within is helpful, but so I think is just being more explicitly aware that external closure is not guaranteed.

I'd like to conclude by going back to the *don'ts* from the guide. In particular- do not behave as though you know best. All of the above are things I feel I can work on, reflect on, and do- but I recognized that I don't necessarily know best, I will be wrong, I will make mistakes, this won't be enough, and so I will have to proceed with humility, acknowledge and apologize for my mistakes, learn from them, and keep trying.

For me, I think of all of these as ongoing starting points, small building blocks in the work to be done.