

Good White Racist?

Confronting Your Role in Racial Injustice

KERRY CONNELLY

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Foreword

The names of C. C. J. Carpenter, Joseph A. Durick, Milton L. Grafman, Paul Hardin, Nolan B. Harmon, George M. Murray, Edward V. Ramage, and Earl Stallings are not readily known by most of the American populace. But together, these men left an indelible mark on the American Civil Rights Movement. In Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, each of these men would have considered themselves among the ranks of the good white people of the nation, especially with regard to race.

They were not.

These clergymen were white moderates. Compared to some other white people, they may have even fancied themselves progressives. Birmingham led the nation in unsolved bombings, and *they* were not personally bombing anyone. Still, they could not stomach what they deemed to be lawlessness in the streets.

Earlier that year, Fred Shuttlesworth, once called “the most courageous civil rights fighter in the South” by none other than Martin Luther King, Jr., invited Dr. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to Birmingham to support desegregation efforts in the city. On Good Friday, April 12, 1963, the same day Dr. King was arrested in Birmingham, these “good” white clergymen offered a scathing rebuke of Dr. King and his efforts in an open letter they titled “A Call for Unity.” They wrote, “we are now confronted by a series of demonstrations by

some of our Negro citizens, directed and led in part by outsiders. We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized. But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely.”¹

There is a certain level of gall that one must possess to seek to set the timetable and parameters by which a people should achieve their liberation, and these clergymen possessed it in abundance.

Such is the gall of whiteness.

Such is the gall of white privilege.

Such is an accomplice of white supremacy.

In response to their letter, Dr. King offered what can only be described as the greatest treatise on nonviolent direct action penned in the twentieth century. He wrote,

You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.²

Then Dr. King brought things into clearer view, removing from these clergymen any semblance of progression or allyship. He wrote,

I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice;

who constantly says: “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action”; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a “more convenient season.” Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.³

It is the unfortunate continuation of this misguided and dangerous sense of privilege and pseudo-supremacy that Kerry Connelly masterfully confronts in this book. Just like in 1963, there are many “good” white people who readily denounce racist words and racial violence. They may even openly express their concerns regarding the near-constant slaughter of unarmed Black men, women, boys, and girls at the hands of police. However, these same “good” white people denounce present-day nonviolent direct-action protests, including the kneeling of American athletes during the National Anthem, as untimely, unwise, and unpatriotic. Some “good” white people believe it their duty to correct proclamations that “Black lives matter!” with the proclamation that “all lives matter!”

These “good” white people criticize Black and Brown people for low voter turnout in national and local elections yet remain eerily silent on issues of voter intimidation, voter disenfranchisement, the gutting of voter protections in the highest court in the land, the gerrymandering of Black and Brown communities, and the failure of all political parties to adequately address policy issues that would transform their lived-in realities. They readily employ such words as “colorblind” to describe themselves and their hopes for our racial future, and they are quick to quote Dr. King about the importance of love and unity. However, they consistently fail to speak about racial equity, and they fail to uplift Dr. King’s call for reparations, a guaranteed income for all Americans, and a congressional act for the disenfranchised. In intimate settings, they employ microaggressions, touch and talk about Black women’s hair without invitation, and think it is a compliment to call a Black person “articulate” to their face.

Indeed, “shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.” This is frequently the peril of “good” white people. Oft times, they are certain that they are helping when they are only helping to preserve a death-dealing status quo. Even when welcoming persons of other racial and ethnic backgrounds into certain spaces, whiteness is often uplifted as normative, and assimilation is often the unspoken goal.

During these still troubled days in America, days where “good” white people frequently call the police on Black people for such mundane activities as meeting in a coffee shop or cutting grass, where the legacy of redlining and racial wealth disparities remain, where thousands of Black and Brown people remain incarcerated for activities presently earning “good” white people outrageous profits, Kerry Connelly is courageously helping to lead the charge to liberate white people from their own failed conception of goodness and, instead, inviting them to become true allies in the liberation of all God’s people.

In this book, “good” white people will find the truth.

If they allow it, the truth shall set them free.

Then we shall all be finally free.

Michael W. Waters
Dallas, Texas

Author's Note

I enter this work with humility (despite any snark you may encounter in the coming pages), and I know there are many BIPOC (Black, indigenous people of color) who are doing this work and have been for decades. I enter this work holding a firm belief that white people must be doing antiracist work first and foremost within our own psyches and emotional landscapes. Only then can we hope to lead other white people in the work of antiracism, and ultimately submit to the leadership of the BIPOC community. My goal is to come alongside the amazing leaders who are already doing this work from the perspective of living in historically oppressed bodies; it is not my intention to displace or usurp those invaluable voices. I dance on the thin line of wanting to own and carry the emotional labor that should have belonged to white people this whole time while simultaneously respecting and honoring the beautiful, laborious work already done by the BIPOC community. I am certainly not the first white person to dance here, but there are nowhere near enough of us at this party.

To my white friends: Fair warning—this is going to be hard. It's going to get real, and you're going to be uncomfortable. I know well the discomfort you're about to encounter, and stronger souls than you have declined the experience. So find something to grab onto, because I'm not mincing words here. But I

promise you that if you're truly the good person you think you are and know you want to be, it will be worth it.

The time is urgent: people are dying.

To readers in the BIPOC community: Beautiful soul, thank you for reading even this far. This book is by a white person for white people, and you do not owe us your participation in this dialogue. You've done enough, borne enough of this weight. It's our turn now. That said, I'm not trying to be your hero and I do not want to put words into your mouths. I do not speak for people of color, nor do I wish to even remotely play the role of "white savior." I think we all have our redemptive work to do in the world—the wrong thing we are to try to make right—even if we do it poorly and make a mess of things. This speaking to white people about whiteness and racism is simply the work that has my name on it.

That said, if I say anything that perpetuates harm, and you feel like it is worth your energy, please call me on it. Send me an email or write a review. I do care to learn. If you see something in these pages and care to take issue with it, I welcome your words. Thank you for reading. And most of all, I ask forgiveness, if you have any left to give.

Introduction

Hi. I'm Kerry, and I'm a racist. (This is where you're supposed to say, "Hi, Kerry.")

But I want you to know that I'm a *good* racist. I don't wear my white sheet over my smiling face. Instead, it's on the inside, where it wraps my heart in fear I desperately wish wasn't there. It's tangled up in my brain, where thoughts flash by at lightning speed before I even have the time to examine them. And it's the sweet satin feel of my privileged skin that lets me slide easily through my every day. Because the truth is, as much as I'd like it not to be true, it's totally possible that I'm a really good person, and a really big racist all at the same time.

Before we all get our knickers in a twist, as my grandmother used to say, let me be clear that this is not a "There are good people on all sides" kind of idea. First of all, I'm not talking about neo-Nazis or the KKK. These are people who have made racist ideology their center of being, a prospect that I find disturbing and disgusting. They are not who I am talking about when I talk about good white racists. Rather, I'm referring to the majority of white people who intellectually believe that racism is evil, that being "color-blind" is good, and who get so uncomfortable talking about race that they will tell racial activists to shut up about it because "it's just making it worse." I'm talking about progressives like me who, in our desire to help tend instead to do more

harm, who talk a great game on the one hand while maintaining the racist status quo on the other. I'm talking about white people like some of my family members who wouldn't hesitate to jump in the water to save a Black person who was drowning but who also, deep down inside—where they might not even realize it's there—hold the belief that there is something inherently defective about that Black body that made it less able to swim and be completely oblivious to the fact that white America limited Black people's access to swimming pools and beaches for generations.

I am one of these good white racists. Though I never had specific thoughts about racialized swimming abilities, I confess there was a time when I held a belief that there was an inherent difference between me and people of color. I didn't know where it came from; it was just there, kind of like my hair or my name. I never questioned its existence—and worse, I never noticed how it operated in my psyche or how it impacted my view of the world.

In fact, for most of my life, I preferred not to talk about race. It's so . . . *uncomfortable*. And like I said, I'm a *good* racist. The kind who really loves Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech, until it comes time to actually do something to manifest said dream. The kind who loves to watch movies about white heroes saving poor Black people from poverty and lives of crime (a stereotype and a fallacy that perpetuates white supremacy). The kind who likes to call herself an *ally*, until my allyship requires action and/or makes me uncomfortable.

I share all those memes about social justice, after all. I voted for Obama. I curse like a truck driver, but I would *never* use the “N” word. And my feelings got *really* hurt when Uncle Bob made that comment about me being a snowflake.

I mean, I'm practically a social justice *warrior*.

You might be like me. And, like me, you might be awakening to the fact that you're all tangled up in your own internal white sheets, and it might be making you super squirmy. Or maybe you're saying, “What sheets? Where? I don't have any sheets. I'm a good person, remember?” Maybe you're sitting in church on Sunday morning, enjoying the choir's performance of a gospel song and hearing how there are no different ethnicities or

genders, no “slave or free” because we’re all “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Then you’re going home to watch the game and wondering if maybe the Take a Knee Movement couldn’t find a more convenient, more *patriotic* way to protest, or whatever.¹ Maybe you’re all about being politically correct, but deep down you don’t *really* think racism is that big of a deal. So someone told a racist joke. So what? It’s not like it’s a hate crime—or actual slavery. People need to relax and stop being so serious all the time. And besides, Oprah is like, a trillionaire or something, so obviously Black people are just fine.

Listen—I get you. You don’t want to be racist, and the fact that I’m even suggesting you might be has you all bunched up inside the way sand gets twisted up in your bathing suit at the beach. I know that sometimes you probably think, *Seriously, can’t we just get over this race thing already?* It’s all pretty exhausting, and you have no idea what to say or do to make it better anyway, so you’d really rather just go ahead and get your yoga on and meditate it all away in your Lululemons (or, if you’re like me, your Lululemon knockoffs, because who can afford that shit?).

If you’re a white guy, it’s probably even harder for you, because you’re really tired of being held up as the epitome of all evil in America by progressives like me. I get it. That probably sucks a lot, especially when you’re just trying to get by, and maybe enjoy life a little bit. After all, you’ve worked hard for what you’ve got. And besides, we live in the land of opportunity, where everyone has a fair shot and there is liberty and justice for all. We just have to go out and grab that golden ring, and make our way in the world.

I know these arguments well. I’ve not only been subjected to them by countless people who disagree with me, but I’ve actually used them myself in what seems like a previous lifetime—a time when I was so afraid someone would think I wasn’t good that I was afraid to say the word “Black” in front of a Black person. As in, “Hey, can you hand me that sweater? No, not that one. The *black* one.” I’d rather walk around in a hot pink and lime green sweater than say “Black” in front of a Black person, lest they think I meant something by it and say that I was racist.

And this is partly because the few times I *did* make an attempt at acknowledging race, I did it poorly and suffered the indignant response from the people of color in front of whom I'd just made an ass out of myself. As a result, I shied away from acknowledging this huge, seemingly cavernous difference between us. I decided to pretend skin color didn't exist. I proudly considered myself color-blind, determined to see anything and everything but the full, complete identity of the people in the room—myself included. The hardest identity for me to see and acknowledge was the one that has been rendered the most invisible to me by society: my own whiteness.

I was, back then, *very* good at being a good white racist—simultaneously both racially unconscious and hyperaware, terrified of saying the wrong thing and yet blissfully unaware of the myriad ways my privilege, my power, and my whiteness as a white woman were at play in every interaction I had with people of color. As a follower of Jesus who attended diverse churches, I believed I had already arrived at the shores of a postracial society; I had Black friends, so obviously, everything was fine. My whiteness was the elephant in the room, the unspoken truth that wielded power in the relationship whether I wanted it to or not.

I think there are tons of white people like me—people with good intentions who are not only completely unaware of the way their own power operates in the world but who also like it that way. Because this is true, it is *our* job—white people, not anyone else's—to acknowledge this power dynamic and then dismantle it, making space for the power of others to emerge.

To do this, we need to notice the systems, institutions, and structures that we all navigate every day—from government, to our language, to our cultural practices and gender roles, to work environments, religious practices, family dynamics, and our criminal justice system—because they all work to support and perpetuate this imbalance of power. By participating in these systems without ever questioning or challenging them, we support it too.

The fact that white people can go through life without ever having to do any really uncomfortable thinking about race is itself a privilege that people of color simply don't have. I've heard white

people say they don't feel "educated or well-equipped enough" to talk about race in any but the most intimate circles. This too is a privileged cop-out. My guess is that most people of color aren't born learning how to navigate the racial biases they encounter every day. There's no "how to be Black and Brown" school. They figure it out as they go as a matter of survival. They teach the inexplicable to their children around the dinner table and on the way to driver education classes and during bath time. To say you are not educated or well equipped or passionate enough to talk about race is really just about you wanting to stay safe and comfortable.

Doing the work of dismantling racism is boundary walking at its finest. It's a high-wire act with no net. It's crossing borders and saying the wrong thing and learning from it when you do. It's being willing to be uncomfortable; it's being willing to say you're sorry; and for the love of all that is good and holy, it's being willing to do your own damn work. And for the record, you don't need to accost the next person of color you see and dive into a deep heart-to-heart about your white goodness and all those racists *out there*.

That is *not* doing the work.

Doing the work is picking up your own burden, doing the research, reading the work of the multitude of voices out there that are different from yours. It's learning from people of color, listening to their stories—and when they tell you how they feel, it's resisting the urge to explain to them why they should feel differently. It's studying how racism (and other "isms") works and committing to doing things differently in your own corner of the world. Doing the work is dismantling all the usual justifications that populate the gotcha memes on Facebook and maybe even your own brain cells. It's being able to look at these issues through the lens of our own whiteness, because it is within whiteness that the problem lies. Hell, it's being able to recognize that you even have a lens to begin with, and understanding that this lens colors the way you see—or don't see—everything.

I'm not saying that we're not good people, you and me. I'm just asking for us to *act* like the good people we are. I'm asking that we all #NoticeTheSystem, that we self-identify as

#GoodWhiteRacists and call that shit out. And yes, I'm saying hashtag the hell out of it. When we see it, name it. It's the first daring, brave act of being truly antiracist in which you and I can participate. Because if even the first tiny step is all of us finally acknowledging that, Houston, we have a problem, I'd be happy. And since you're a good person and all, I know you want to be antiracist.

Right?

I also know this isn't easy. God knows it's not easy for me every time I discover another racist thought floating around my head or realize another way I'm complicit in the system. I know that I've probably already made you a little uncomfortable, if not outright pissed off. That's okay. Let's just sit with that for a hot second. Because honestly, our discomfort is not the problem. It's our absolute refusal to roll around in that discomfort that's the problem. It's the fact that we'd rather run from the room screaming, "I'm good! I'm good! I swear to God I'm good!" than actually sit and practice a tiny little bit of honest self-reflection.

Until we can take a good, hard look at who we are as white people, how we operate in the world, and what the systems are that maintain the status quo, race relations in America will not improve. Now, some of you may think that's totally fine. Some of you might be totally cool with that, because as of right now, you can't see any good reason to switch things up. But I'm saying if you want to be good, that attitude just ain't gonna fly.

Your neighbors—people of color—are practically drowning in our toxic whiteness. If you're a good person, when you see someone drowning, not only will you jump in to pull them out, but once you do, you'll also do the good hard work of building a safety fence around the pool they fell into in the first place—just like any good American hero would. You can't be a good person and ignore your drowning neighbor. You can't be a good person and let a dangerous situation continue when it threatens to consume your community.

What you can do, however, is *pretend* to be a good person. You can act like you don't hear the cries for help while you sit there on your deck with your little pink drink with the umbrella or your

nice cold beer, determined to keep your eyes on the beautiful horizon, your line of sight hovering just over the pool where your neighbor is sputtering, trying desperately to tread water. You can pretend you don't hear, don't see, don't know. But that doesn't make you good.

In fact, that makes you pretty evil.

You know it, and I know it. So let's stop pretending, shall we? Let's agree, one way or the other. You can go ahead and put this book down now, keep your eyes on the horizon, your ears plugged tight, and your head held in the pride of your false goodness, your own inherent evil that shines so bright it makes you blind. Or you can be willing to wade into these deep, disturbing waters with me, even if it's cold and frightening and we're both really scared of what we're going to find.

Though I have studied this topic like crazy, I confess that I am still learning. In fact, I'm pretty sure it will be a lifelong project. I have had countless conversations about this topic in which I said stupid things, and I have read a lot about it (though still not enough). I have talked about this on the *White on White* podcast, and I have written about it on the *Jerseygirl, Jesus* blog (and suffered the trolls for it too). I have listened to people of color, I have hated my own self and cried my white tears and carried the burden of my own white, useless guilt, and now I can boldly and loudly tell you a secret: I am a good white racist.

And I am in recovery.

The Good Nation of America

(Or, *We're Good, but Not as Good as We Think*)

The books always smelled a little funny; even the dust that perpetually covered them seemed old and wise. I would flip through the pages and stare at hollowed-out eyes, protruding rib cages, and piles of shoes and eyeglasses. I would gaze into the ancient and wizened eyes of the American soldiers, shell-shocked and dazed, helmet straps loosened and hanging down by their chins. Faces dirtied by war, they appeared haunted by their witness of the purest evil. They were the unlucky few, the reluctant heroes, the ones who won the war and freed the Jews from the terrors of the Holocaust, from the horrors of Dachau and Mauthausen.

These Americans—they were *good*.

My father's old books proved it. There it was, captured in strangely faded pictures on pages that smelled a little funny and held the dust of the ages, and told in the stories of how the Americans swooped in to save the Jews, and the day.¹

It's practically biblical, right?

The images of these American soldiers who freed the Holocaust survivors—happy, youthful couples dancing in the streets of New York, where joyful sailor boys kissed their lady folk in Times Square in celebration of a well-won victory² are embedded in our collective subconscious as a country. Americans are the heroes—the good guys, the proverbial knights in shining armor. We dance in the street while everyone else deals with the cold,

harsh reality of what happens when people lose touch with their human side. We get to be shiny-toothed and gleaming. We get to be bright-eyed and optimistic, safe in the land of plenty. And all is as it should be.

Or is it?

It's almost as though we could follow a shiny, gleaming timeline that traces our own goodness. It could start with those first—well, let's call them *settlers* for now—the idealistic underdogs desperate for religious freedom and committed to creating freedom and justice for all (or at least, all white, land-owning men) while they forged a new territory with uncompromised ruggedness and neophyte American grit. I mean, I can practically feel the prairie dust under my fingernails. Fast-forward through the Civil War, and you'll see where America finally came to its moral senses, freed the slaves, and allegedly restored justice, the whole slavery thing being just an unfortunate blip on our otherwise spotless record. We can speed through the idealized suburbia and white-toothed, lobotomized commercials of the midcentury, flash through the uncomfortable discord of the 1960s, and head right to the fall of evil communism, to that day our movie-star president exclaimed, "Mr. Gorbachev, take down that wall!" and the fear of a *Red Dawn* was mitigated.

This has always been our collective identity as Americans. We are good, and our enemy is evil. To suggest otherwise is a sort of national heresy the likes of which can get you banned from any sports bar worth its salt. This is the history we teach in our schools, where kindergarteners celebrate that big ole party where the "Pilgrims and Indians" sat down together for a big turkey dinner. We maybe chastise Christopher Columbus for his shrewdness—but just a little—in the way he swindled the tribal chiefs out of their land for some pretty beads (but really, those silly, naive Indians should have known those beads were worthless, *chuckle, chuckle*). We don't mention the blankets laced with smallpox or the Trail of Tears. These things remain in the educational netherworld, truths to be discovered with the breaking of our own identities as we grow into our personhood as adults. For so many of us educated in the twentieth century—and perhaps

even now—this is like discovering that Santa Claus isn't real, that our parents are human, that teachers have first names.

We hide from our own shadow side, unable to hold the paradox that as generally good people, we can do incredibly bad things. The truth is that if you look at the body of our work as a nation—the whole history, and not just the bits we like—there are two things that are true: First, America is gleaming. We are inherently idealistic, a beautiful experiment in human imagination and potential. Second, we are evil. We are a gluttonous machine of turning gears that mangle the souls of men, women, and children alike. And each one of us—every single one of us—is a participant in this absurdity.

What's a Good White Racist, Anyway?

Before we go any further, it might be helpful to dive a little deeper into how I'm using certain words, because I know that these words tend to be intense and to elicit strong reactions in many of us. Let's start with the big one: What is a good white racist, anyway?

Good

Americans have a sanitized version of goodness that often leaves little room for complexity or nuance. Our Sunday schools teach us that goodness is secured if we don't drink, smoke, or have sex, that our righteousness is guaranteed with a simple prayer of salvation. We were raised on a snack food of "good guys versus bad guys," with superheroes to save the day and villains with clearly defined low moral standards. Goodness doesn't come in layers in the American psyche; you either are, or you aren't—and once you aren't, you aren't forever. Good people, however, toe the line. They are nice and never disruptive, and they value peace and comfort and the status quo. Good people never make other people uncomfortable with their words. In fact, good people are fluent in the lexicon of niceness, where, for sure, no one ever mentions whiteness.

White

And whiteness? That's an interesting concept. We'll do a deep dive into the constructed identity that is whiteness in chapter 2, but it's important to understand from the get-go that whiteness is a social construct, not a biological one. Should you happen to have been born into a body that has paler skin, you have been automatically granted certain benefits and privileges that people with more melanin simply don't have. This is true even when you struggle to find a job or pay your bills or have to go to court or fail math class. White privilege means that even though your life may not be easy, the color of your skin does not provide additional obstacles to your success.

Because privilege is often invisible to those who have it, here's a handy list of some of the ways white privilege may operate—in society, and yes, in your life too. Keep in mind that intersectionality is also at play here. That means that your gender or sexual identity, your class, and your physical ability and embodiment may also interact with your racial identity to impact the way these privileges operate in your life.

Economic privilege is the ability to build generational wealth and to easily access the basic requirements of life: food, housing, clothing, and so forth, as well as luxuries such as private transportation, rest from labor, and decent health care.

Spatial privilege is the ability to move through space safely, without fear of violence perpetrated on your body by individuals or the state.

Educational privilege is the ability to feel certain that public education will meet your needs and not prohibit you from obtaining a quality education through educational geographical gerrymandering, instructor or administrative bias, or the school-to-prison pipeline. It is the ability to know that any disabilities or struggles you have in school will receive medical or curative interventions rather than criminal or punitive interventions.

Intellectual privilege is the ability to be recognized for your intellectual accomplishments and not erased from the public narrative. In school and in the workplace, your intellect is never

questioned. Additionally, recognition for your accomplishments is not relegated to a single month of the year or a special table in the back for “white authors.” Rather, your ideas are celebrated for their own right, alongside any other ideas of equal import.

Historical privilege is the ability to see members of your race accurately represented in history books and given credit for their contributions to society. The impact of social policies on your racial, ethnic, or gender group is portrayed appropriately. Your cultural practices throughout history are not diminished, considered “primitive” or less advanced.

Generational privilege is the ability to search for your roots and actually find them. It is the ability to know who your ancestors were.

Bodily privilege is the ability to move through society free from the judgment that your body’s natural state does not meet a certain standard, and from people claiming some sort of ownership and the right to touch you.

As white people, once we understand the different types of privilege we enjoy, we can fight for the right to these privileges for others.

People—especially people with power—will think differently about you than they will people of color. As a result, they will go easier on you, offer you assistance rather than police your body, and be more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt when you mess up. In other words, people who have been assigned a white identity by society are often also presumed to be good and have to work really hard at proving otherwise. Meanwhile, good people of color are presumed automatically to be bad, often while they’re just moving through the world, just trying to exist. That reality is not merely the result of the prejudiced actions of *some* white people. Rather, it is evidence of a pervasive, all-encompassing culture of systemic racism.

Racist

Because I know the R-word freaks everybody out, let’s go about defining it too, because I mean something very specific when I

use it. *Racism* refers to a system of hierarchy based on the belief that one race is superior to all others. Most often, and as is definitely the case in the United States, this manifests as both a collective social more and an individual belief. When combined with power—which is usually economic but can manifest in other ways—it becomes institutionalized.

Institutionalized racism is the way that belief becomes ingrained and reinforced in societal organizations, such as government, education, the judicial system, economics, and media (just to name a few).

Individual racism is a set of personal conscious or unconscious beliefs that assume one race is superior to all others. It is important to note that individual racism can be held by both the dominant and the oppressed person, but only in relation to the oppressed person. In other words, in the United States, where whiteness is held as the highest rank on the hierarchical system, *white people cannot be victims of racism*. So-called reverse racism is just not a thing, people. However, people of color may hold internalized racist views about their own race, and they may hold hierarchically racist beliefs about members of other groups (i.e., prejudice).

Systemic racism is the ways in which these types of racism work together to directly impact BIPOC on a large scale and privilege whites in the United States.

These qualities converge to create good white racists. First, good white racists are people who have been assigned the racial identity of whiteness. Second, good white racists are people who benefit from that assignment in a social system that privileges whiteness. Third, good white racists are generally nice people who intellectually do not approve of racist behaviors but who practice them anyway. Fourth, good white racists are—for a time, at least—unaware of the ways they benefit from and perpetuate racist systems that privilege them. Finally, good white racists generally respond with defensiveness when they are confronted with their participation in racist systems, because they are more concerned (possibly obsessed) with two things: their own comfort and their own inherent goodness.

The continuation of chapter 1 is not included in this sample.

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