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Dear Friends,

“Until you can recognize you are living a racialized life and you’re having racialized experiences every moment of every day, you can’t actually engage people of other races around the idea of justice.” Whitney Dow, “The Whiteness Project”

My skin has been electric this week with anger and frustration about racism and white supremacy and white privilege in this country, evidenced most recently by the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, and the “bird-watching while black” incident in Central Park. I hope yours has been too.

The woman in Central Park played out a very old trope in American history - the innocent white woman being threatened by a rapacious black man. Look to "Birth of a Nation" in 1915 to see this play out. Look to Emmett Till's death for something his accuser years later said he didn't do. Look to the more modern movie, "Get Out" to see how white women depend on this narrative.

Even though she wasn't in any way threatened and her increasing hysteria was performative, she knew she could count on the police to believe her, and she put Chris Cooper in harm's way. She knew that too. In her apology, she insists that she isn't racist, but the racist society in which she has been socialized taught her to be fearful of black men--it also taught her that they are not to correct her, that they stand beneath her. I don't think she was fearful; she was outraged. She

charged at him. Hardly the actions of a fearful person.

And so, she played out this important trope of white innocence. And the kind of white privilege that consciously and unconsciously knows society will support them, that the police will come, and that Chris Cooper will be harmed and made to pay for his actions.

We didn't ask to be socialized in a racist society, and it takes real work to overcome that socialization. It is one reason that Victor Lee Lewis and I are teaching a course about whiteness, in which this incident and the resulting dialogue filled an hour and a half this week, deconstructing the racism that leads us to believe he must have done something to threaten her-why else would this woman have responded the way she did? Why is the burden of proof of innocence always on the black man if not for this racism we all carry with us daily.

We don't understand the sheer, breathtaking power of our whiteness, and its destructiveness. We must. Each of us has a responsibility to unlearn the lessons our white supremacist culture has taught us from a very young age, those lessons we are mostly unaware of. Otherwise, we are perpetuating a system in which Christian Cooper can be threatened and George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and so many others have died needlessly. Do your work, my white friends. Do your work.

A Reading List

Many people have asked this week how to educate themselves. Read, then read some more. Take a class (see below for Hard Conversations courses starting in June and July).

Start with these two books:

[*White Fragility*](#) by Robin D'Angelo

[*How to Be an Anti-Racist*](#) by Ibram X. Kendi.

[Watch this.](#)

Coming Up

Hard Conversations: Whiteness, Race, and Social Justice

We must understand our whiteness and the power it wields. This five-week course explores whiteness, white supremacy, race as a social construct, among other topics. [Go here](#) for information. Starts June 23.

Hard Conversations: An Introduction to Racism

A five-week online class focused on systemic and structural racism, white privilege and white fragility, the myth of colorblindness, and how to be an effective ally. [Go here](#) for information. Starts July 1.

WRITERS IN THE PANDEMIC (June)

Are you having a hard time making meaning of what is happening internally for you in this pandemic? This 2-week course is for writers and non-writers to start exploring making-meaning of all this <waves hands around wildly>. Over 200 people have participated thus far, some calling it “life-changing.” If you’re ready for some structure, some meaning-making, and exploration, join the next cohort of this class on June 1. Two weeks, two Zoom classes, an online classroom with daily prompts, and a private FB group. Just \$37 (Pandemic pricing). [Go here](#) for information.

If you have already taken the Writers in the Pandemic course, you might want to continue with [“Writers in the Pandemic 2”](#) or [“Writers in the Pandemic - 3,”](#) both of which also start on June 1.

**ONLINE FREE WEEKLY GATHERINGS:**

During this pandemic, I will host a weekly tea-time on Zoom for whoever would like to show up with a cup of tea, a quote, or poem to share, or just a need for conversation. You can join me on **Thursdays from 4-4:45 pm Eastern** in [this Zoom room](#). We have an innate need for community, and the technology to create community spaces... Bring paper and pen in case we start writing.

Thanks for reading. If you like this newsletter and want to support it, forward it to someone who'd like it. If you're seeing this newsletter for the first time, [you can subscribe here](#).

Step up,

Patti

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