# CHAPTER 0.
# LANGUAGE, POLITICS, AND HABITS

Why is there a chapter 0? I think it is important to establish a few definitions and key ideas that I draw on in the rest of this book. These terms may be triggers for some readers. I don't want them to be. I want them to be terms that help us engage together, perhaps engage through our disagreements. This chapter is important because it helps me tell my story better, and it must come first.

Let me give you an example to help explain. Imagine you are trying to have a conversation about going to Los Angeles with someone you care about, someone you respect, say your sister. You believe that both of you would have a great time, be enriched in a number of ways, if you both took a trip to L.A. Your sister, let's call her Angelica, doesn't like L.A., won't even talk about it. Now, every time you mention the topic, or even say "L.A.," you can see her face crinkle up, her eyes narrow, and her mood become sour and angry. She gets upset about it.

She had a really bad experience in L.A. ten years ago. She never wants to go back, and even talking about the city reminds her of that terrible event. But you have good reason to think this time will not be like that last one. Things are different, better. In fact, you have made extra efforts to ensure that your proposed L.A. trip with Angelica will be really great, nothing like her last one. But she just won't listen when you bring it up. You can't even get to the details. She turns and goes away or focuses in on how the details she does hear are just like the L.A ten years ago, the bad L.A.

So your job, if you really think that trip is worth it, is not to convince Angelica about how good the trip is or will be, or how her last trip to L.A. was a fluke, an unlucky set of occurrences, or simply a long time ago. Your best shot at convincing her likely will be to help her through her emotional response to the idea of L.A., not to change her mind, but to help her deal more productively with those emotions and see how they may be keeping her from hearing new details, a different L.A. You have to help her hear details that may be different from her initial ideas.

This kind of problem is what I think many people have with the terms that I explain in this chapter, like White language supremacy. Angelica is missing out on a really great trip and a great city, but she's also right. Her experiences were awful, a good reason not to go back. But if she can't confront at some point those past experiences and her emotions about them and find a way through it

all—that is, if she can't sit with difference meaningfully—she is limited, and her limitations are self-imposed. She imposes a boundary on her life that excludes L.A., a place that is bound to offer her something rich, even if she never goes on the trip. This chapter, I hope, helps some readers who might be in Angelica's position around issues of racism and White language supremacy. These ideas are vital to my story in the rest of this book.

Now, should you find that you still have trouble reading, trouble accepting ideas, even just entertaining them long enough to hear what I'm saying, you might read my appendix, "An Argument and Method for Deep Attentive Reading," which I mentioned in the Introduction. That stand alone essay offers a compassionate reading practice that I think can help. I know it has helped me.

The essay also offers a more detailed discussion of several key ideas that I reference throughout the rest of this book, namely, the availability and WYSIATI heuristics, confirmation bias, and the halo effect, all of which Daniel Kahneman discusses and that keep many people from considering seriously different ideas or arguments from those they already hold.[1] These are mindbugs we all have that Banaji and Greenwald also explain.[2] They are ways our brains often think too fast and in the process make faulty judgements. And they are implicated in racism and my literacy story.

## WHITE LANGUAGE SUPREMACY

"White language supremacy" is a term that can conjure up some ugly feelings. The words "White" and "supremacy" in the same phrase often trigger many people, particularly White people, because it can sound like I'm calling all White people racist, or I'm placing evil intentions on all White people, but I'm not. I'm not even referring to people's intentions or attitudes when I use this term. This misunderstanding is reasonable in the US today, since historically the phrase "White supremacy" is connected to bad people doing and saying bad or racist things, like enslaving and lynching Black Americans, imprisoning those of Japanese and Arab descent into "internment camps" or "detention centers," or turning high-powered water hoses onto innocent people.

While certainly the kind of White supremacy I'm speaking of in this book is historically related to that kind from the past in the US, it does not look the same today, is not accomplished in the same ways, nor is it experienced in exactly the same ways. But it is connected to our past. It is a legacy we live in.

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1    Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

2    The concept of "mindbugs" comes from chapter 1 of Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald, *Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People* (New York: Bantam Books, 2016).

We must remember that who and what we are today is built on who and what we were yesterday. We don't escape our history because we are born from the material of history. We cannot say that we are only shaped by today's stuff or by just the good stuff of our past. We gots all of it—the good, the bad, and the other—in us. So White supremacy, as Robin DiAngelo tells us about racism, is "a structure, not an event."[3]

Dina Gilio-Whitaker, an indigenous scholar who studies native environmental justice, offers a good explanation of her use of the term "White supremacy" and of the anxiety around it for many people. She connects it to U.S. settler colonial history and the injustices done against native American tribes and nations and their homelands. It is worth reading her explanation at length:

> Americans like to think that since the civil rights era, we have achieved the postracial, meritocratic, multicultural state where color blindness and equal opportunity prevails. Both liberals and conservatives like to think that racism is defined only by hostile behavior from which individuals can excuse themselves because they have friends, employees, perhaps an old lover or two who are people of color. In this way of thinking, White supremacy is an ideology restricted only to rogue alt-right, neo-Nazis or White-nationalist fringe groups, and certainly not well-meaning everyday people, whether conservative or liberal. While White supremacy is most definitely at the root of those regressive social movements, as a foundational worldview constructed by centuries of White European settlement of the United States, it is far broader than that. It is the thread from which the American social fabric is woven. A few decades of laws promoting racial justice have failed to unravel the systemic forms that White supremacy has taken, reflected by a range of social indicators from chronic wealth inequality to negative educational outcomes to disproportionate rates of violence (police, sexual, and domestic) and incarceration in communities of color. Centuries of dehumanization of American Indians, African Americans, and ethnic minority "others" has left its mark on the American mind and in its institutions, refusing to die.[4]

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3   DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 28.
4   Dina Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long As Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight For Environmental Justice, From Colonization to Standing Rock* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019), 99.

What Gilio-Whitaker highlights is a "range of social indicators" that help us see White supremacy in our world. These indicators are conditions that are the effects of White supremacy and its cause. In short, White supremacy can be seen in the *conditions* that we all live in and that disproportionately hurt people of color in the US.

These conditions typically help or privilege those deemed racially White, mostly through historically made structures that are connected to or associated with racial groups and the places each group tends to live in. Such structures consist of things like language practices, family wealth, different qualities of schools in particular neighborhoods, and the different levels of police engagement and crime rates in various areas of a city. Thus, my use of this term in this book is not meant to directly reference evil people, or bad intentions, or hooded figures burning crosses, even though it is historically connected to that kind of overt racism.

The term as I use it is meant to help us remember our history, not forget it. Race, while not biological or real in that sense, is an important factor in who we are, how we use and judge language, and what we believe. Race is so interlaced in our world that we often mistake it for something else.

The terms I use are meant to remind us that we are trying to *change conditions*, systems, not people's minds or hearts, although changing our conditions can change minds and hearts. It takes time, though, for the new antiracist structures to do their work on us. So it's important to use these words, even if they are initially shocking or jarring, even if they make us uncomfortable, or pause, or cringe.

When we were first married, my wife and I lived with her grandma in a home in Monmouth, Oregon. My wife's father and mother and I were sitting out on the patio in the back. We were talking about the wedding a year before, how nice it was, how many people showed up. One of them, I think her mom, a selfless and kind White woman who has worked very hard her whole life, mostly for those around her, said, "They thought you were *Mexican*." She said the last word, "Mexican," in a half-whisper, and I thought I saw her scrunch her nose just slightly on the word. She explained that others disapproved of her daughter's marriage to me at first, that they told her this at the wedding. "You allowed her to marry *him*?" they asked. She said to us, "We told them that you were Japanese, not Mexican." No whisper.

I remember how uncomfortable the conversation was, how quickly it turned, not just because race was referenced, or rather whispered, but that it was also deployed to show I was accepted into their family. I was glad she moved on quickly and politely. This was my new family. I loved them. I love them more today. I did not want to cause strife because I disapproved of how they defended me. I didn't want to call them out on the racist language they were likely trying to avoid and probably thought they were successful at avoiding.

This is often how White language supremacy operates in our daily lives. It is hard to see and hear and even harder to talk about, to investigate. This kind of work requires conscious compassion, suffering with others, like my misguided mother-in-law, whom I love dearly. We have so few words that can help us through our racism. And yet, our words make us and unmake us. They are all we have.

*White language supremacy,* therefore, can be defined as the condition in classrooms, schools, and society where rewards are given in determined ways to people who can most easily reach them, because those people have more access to the preferred embodied White language habits and practices. These White language habits are so because they historically have come from White racial groups in the US who have had the power to make such standards and enforce them in schools, civic spaces, governments, and businesses. Part of the conditions of White language supremacy is an assumption in most systems that what is reachable at a given moment for the normative, White, middle- and upper-class, monolingual English user is reachable for all.

This assumption is often cloaked in narratives or justifications that use meritocracy and "fairness," such as "everyone must be judged by the same standards," without examining who tends to be most advantaged by the use of such universal standards. It seems irrelevant to consider where those standards of expression come from, who made them, and who they tend to benefit most in the present context. This assumption is also justified in arguments about merit, bootstrapping, and the idea that anyone can achieve as long as they work hard and long enough, while ignoring who tends to end up achieving the most, who usually must work harder for the same benefits or opportunities, and what prior preparation is necessary in order for someone to be able to take advantage of those opportunities.

Here's how we know White supremacy and White language supremacy exist and are vigorously reproduced in our world: look to who controls things in our society and where they come from. In her discussion of White supremacy, Robin DiAngelo offers a list of facts about the U.S. society's systems that amount to White supremacy in the key areas of education, literacy, government, business, and entertainment. Each of these areas play an important part in determining which English language standards are used, what language is normal and acceptable, and how people think about that language. Here's a shortened version of DiAngelo's list:

- Ten richest Americans: 100% White
- U.S. Congress: 90% White
- U.S. governors: 96% White

- Top military advisors: 100% White
- People who decide which TV shows we see: 93% White
- People who decide which news is covered: 85% White
- People who decide which music is produced: 95% White
- People who directed the one hundred top-grossing films of all time, worldwide: 95% White
- Teachers: 82% White
- Full-Time college professors: 84% White[5]

These are the judges and decisions makers in our society. They make our structures and conditions, our society. We inherit these structures and conditions, often taking them for granted. We consider them normal and neutral. At face value, they do not appear to be about race or White racial superiority. They seem like objective, race-neutral policies about language use, or about standards for evaluation and grading in schools, or about practices of reading and judging words and people. But these structures are little machines that help us do things and make things with words, like communicate or make decisions. These little language machines can only make particular things in predetermined ways, because that is how machines work. They are designed to produce a particular thing in a particular way. This is to say, all machines have their biases. They cannot make something else or change the way they operate on their own. Our language habits are little machines.

To make something else or make something in a different way, we have to dismantle the machine and build a new machine. This is why my definition for White language supremacy centers on *conditions* and *assumptions*, both of which are structural in nature. That is, we may not realize we are in these conditions or have these assumptions, but we operate from them nonetheless. Assumptions are thought and judgement structures we take for granted, use unconsciously most of the time because it's more efficient to do so. This is Kahneman's fast thinking.[6] It's implicit racial and other biases, or the mind-bugs that Banaji and Greenwald discuss.[7] Thus, White language supremacy is not an intention or an expressed goal for anyone or any system; rather it is an inherited condition in society, schools, classrooms, courtrooms, boardrooms, everywhere, that determines the outcomes in these places as White language supremacist.

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5    DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 31.

6    Kahneman, *Thinking*.

7    Banaji and Greenwald, *Blind Spot*.

To see our world as White supremacist is not to say that White people have gotten things they have not worked for, that they are less than who they think they are. That's one of the paradoxes. I am making no comment on whether a particular White individual or group has earned all that they have, or are as good as the system seems to say they are. In fact, I'm willing to assume they are good and have earned all they have, but this does not negate the fact that the systems they have worked in and used to earn their rewards are White supremacist, that it helps them more than others, even as most White people have not asked for that help.

Just because you aren't to blame for the way the system works doesn't mean that you don't unfairly benefit from it. So it ain't enough to say, "well, I worked hard for what I have." White language supremacy ain't about how hard you worked to get what you got. It's about the fact that your hard work doesn't equate to the same rewards as others, that White people's hard work is worth more than people of color's, and that this fact is set up in our systems of rewards and punishments.

Meanwhile, the same systems make it more difficult for people of color to receive the same kinds of rewards with the same kinds of efforts and work. And these systems are overlapping. You cannot just get rid of one White supremacist set of structures and think you've solved the problem of White supremacy. These are the conditions of life in the US, and they are so ubiquitous, so normal, so dispassionate in the way they function, we often don't notice how racist they are.

The conditions of White language supremacy are those in which the environment is set up so that rewards move mostly in one direction—that is, they are given to particular people with particular linguistic and bodily dispositions or habits. These language habits historically have come from a White racial formation.[8] The assumptions about these language habits are that they are the best, clearest, and most effective ways to communicate. The rewards, opportunities, and privileges that these habits give people are not usually described or identified as racialized in nature, but because of the racialized outcomes that they produce

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8    I use "racial formation" as well as "racial group," but racial formation preserves the dynamic and evolving nature of any group of people defined by a socially changing construct like race—race is "forming" always. This means that a racial formation such as a White racial formation is different today in New York than it was say in 1900 in the same place, or different from a White racial formation in London, England. What it means to be White is not static but changes depending on place and time. I take the term "racial formation" from Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 109.

(like fewer African American and Latine[9] in certain key professions), they really are racist in practice, or *de facto*.

For instance, we say we just want our lawyers or nurses to speak clearly and effectively in order to do their jobs well, but what we mean by clear and effective speech is language that matches a dominant form of English that excludes Black English and other English varieties. The assumption is that other forms of English are less communicative, less effective, less professional, or less able to do the jobs of lawyering or nursing.[10] This dominant standard of English comes from a group of White, middle and upper class, monolingual men who speak English and often come from New England or the East Coast.

While we can say that African Americans are not inherently born predisposed to speaking Black English, many do, more do than White people, relative to each group's total numbers. There are lots of structural reasons for this linguistic phenomenon in society, which have to do with where many African Americans have lived or have been forced to live, where they go to

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9    The terms Latino, Latina, Latinx, and Latine, which are various ways that many use to refer to those who come from Central and South America, are complicated and political. There has been much debate about the use of these terms. Latinx has been used as a gender inclusive term, but the "x" ending is not a Spanish language ending, and many consider it an Anglicized version of the root word, which has masculine (o) and feminine (a) ends depending on the reference. The "e" ending, which is a gender neutral ending in Spanish, is also used for a gender neutral reference; however, some point out that the "e" ending on "Latino" is illegitimate, since it has not been there historically. I am unsure. Language changes all the time. My mentor, Victor Villanueva, who is Puerto Rican and speaks English and Spanish, prefers "Latine" to refer to those from Central and South America, so I will use that term in this book for the gender inclusive term, realizing that this decision may be contested. For some discussion on these terms, see Ecleen Luzmila Caraballo, "This Comic Breaks Down Latinx vs. Latine for Those Who Want to Be Gender-Inclusive," Remezcla, October 24, 2019, https://remezcla.com/culture/latinx-latine-comic/; Raquel Reichard, "Latino/a vs. Latinx vs. Latine: Which Word Best Solves Spanish's Gender Problem?" *Latina*, March 30 2017, http://latina-1051845746.us-east-1.elb.amazonaws.com/lifestyle/our-issues/latinoa-latinx-latine-solving-spanish-gender-problem. And to see a comic strip that breaks down the term nicely, see Terry Blas, "'Latinx' is Growing in Popularity. I Made a Comic to Help You Understand Why," The Highlight by VOX, last updated October 23, 2019, https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/10/15/20914347/latin-latina-latino-latinx-means.

10    While she doesn't explain the structural reasons for the phenomenon, Yolanda Young provides statistics from the American Bar Association on the number of Black and White lawyers, clerks, and judges in the U.S. She explains, "According to the American Bar Association, 88% of all lawyers are White and only 4.8% are Black, so for each of the 60,864 Black lawyers, there are 686 Black citizens needing assistance (compared with only 282 White citizens for each of the 1,117,118 White lawyers)." In actuality, the disparity is of course much greater because African Americans are disproportionately entangled in the criminal justice system—one in 15 Black men is incarcerated, compared to one in 106 White men. See Yolanda Young, "Why the U.S. Needs Black Lawyers Even More Than It Needs Black Police," *Guardian*, May 11, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/11/why-the-us-needs-black-lawyers.

school, and where and who they commune with in churches, schools, and neighborhoods.

The same historical and social dynamics that create the conditions for many Black Americans to use Black English also create conditions for many White Americans to use versions of English that share more language conventions with the dominant Standardized English.[11] The result is unsurprising: African Americans lose opportunities. But they do so not because they are Black, but because they use Black Englishes. This really means statistically that if you are Black, you ain't likely to be a lawyer or doctor. And as I'll show in my story, your English is you, and you are your English. Making decisions based on the kind of English a person uses is making decisions based on race.

Language standards are a way to be White supremacist without being White supremacist or using White supremacist language. In 1981, Martin Barker, a professor of media and cultural studies at the University of West England (and later at Aberystwyth University), identified a similar phenomenon in public children's comics and literature in the United Kingdom under the rule of Margaret Thatcher. Barker coined the term "new racism" that identified the way these language strategies maintained the same old racist policies, ideas, and outcomes.[12]

Similarly, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's important sociological studies show how US students and others can be racist without being racist.[13] We can have good intentions, be good people, demand "clear and logical" writing from students in schools, yet through those standards we end up promoting White language supremacy because those standards and expectations come historically from a White racial formation in the Western world. I'll say much more about this in the rest of this book. When such standards are used to decide grades,

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11    For a definitive study of Black English, see Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977). For discussions on the relationship between race and language attitudes, see H. Samy Alim, John R. Rickford, and Arnetha Ball, eds., *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas About Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

12    Martin Barker, *The New Racism: Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe* (London: Junction Books 1981).

13    See Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 3 (1997): 465–480, https://doi.org/10.2307/2657316; Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001); Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "'New Racism,' Color-Blind Racism, and the Future of Whiteness in America," in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. A. W. Doane and E. Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge, 2003), 271–284; Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

opportunities, and preferred methods of communication for everyone, they privilege White people and disadvantage people of color and poor people. It's White language supremacy without White supremacists.

## THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

In this book, when I speak of White language supremacy, I'm also talking about the politics of English languages. What do I mean by "politics"? I'm not referencing political parties or agendas in the typical sense of the word, "politics." That is, I'm not talking about whether someone is a Democrat or a Republican. It isn't those kinds of politics I am linking to standards and language usage. I'm referring to power relations in social and institutional settings, like schools, offices, churches, and public settings. And these power relations are always uneven or unequal. Some people have more power to do and say things than others in particular contexts. Some are more influential than others. Part of this phenomenon is due to the ways our Englishes are unequal.

And so in each setting, some ideas and words are more influential, attractive, and compelling than others. Conversely, there are other words and ideas that are less attractive, negative, or repellent than some. In short, politics means power relationships between people and between various language habits. So when I say that our use of language standards is political, I mean that not everyone gets to make judgements and decisions about language usage or standards that count and that not all words and ideas are considered equally, even when they should be. This means that not everyone gets to be heard or read as authoritative or compelling or persuasive for all kinds of reasons that have little to do with what they are saying and a lot more do with where they come from or who they are understood to be.

Let me give you an example that you likely have a lot of experience with. In classrooms, the teacher has more power to administer rewards and punishments, to make those in the class do things. Students usually have very little power to do this. We generally know why these politics work this way in schools. Teachers are trained in the subjects they teach and hired by schools to teach, thus their expertise is validated in many ways that we do not question. People with college degrees have knowledge and experiences that give them expertise in areas like teaching writing or history. They are granted more power to control things in classrooms because of their expertise.

Often, titles and positions—like teacher or professor, doctor or lawyer—as well as the money (salary) that goes along with such titles confirm to us that those people know things, that an institution or company has confirmed their knowledge and given them power to exercise. They are qualified to do their job and control things. They are often seen as knowledgeable and trustworthy in

their areas of work and expertise. The teacher or doctor couldn't be hired to do their job otherwise, right? There are vetting processes that are competitive. So the most qualified end up with jobs, right?

But we can only accept the expertise of the teacher on these grounds if we accept the overlapping systems and institutions of education, commerce, training, and hiring in schools that create that expertise and in turn create the politics of the classroom. So the sources of power relations among people and their words are structural. Systems create power. And as DiAngelo's list of White dominated leaders and influencers shows, these systems currently reproduce authorities and experts who come from the same places as each other, White places. So really, our current systems create White power.

These same politics work in every language situation in our lives. Even sitting around our dinner table talking to our family members is created by conditions that affect the language we use and how it is heard and judged by those around us. I'm not suggesting that we question all authority, or that everyone with power should not have it. I'm saying that there is always a politics that constructs what we understand, how we understand it, who gets to make the rules and decisions, and what language and ideas end up being judged as acceptable and most compelling.

So, when we notice that an idea is very persuasive to many people, like the idea that "in the US, hard work always pays off," then we might ask: What political conditions help give that idea power? What conditions or systems make it compelling and persuasive in the present situation? We do not control a lot of the conditions we find ourselves in each day. For instance, none of us control the fact that in the US, most consider the language of business, education, commerce, politics, and everyday social life to be a particular kind of English.

We don't control the history of how that English has been used in any of those past settings in the US. We don't control who has been in control in those settings or what their biases and experiences with language, particular ideas, and people were. We just inherit these conditions. And these conditions shape further conditions, such as when we find ourselves sitting in a classroom or living room entertaining the idea that "in the US, hard work always pays off," or "my doctor or nurse should speak 'proper English.'"

But there are more overlapping factors that contribute to our language conditions and the politics inherent in them. Our own histories, biases, experiences, and idiosyncrasies also form language conditions. For example, we don't choose the particular brand of English, if that's your first language, that we speak and use. It is an inheritance, not a choice. It is a gift from our elders who nurtured us as children and adolescents. It evolves with those friends and others with whom we commune on a daily basis, a product of countless tiny decisions made each

day in our lives, until what we say and how we say it all just seems natural to us.

Our own version of English is also a product of an incredible string of lucky circumstances that brought each of us to where we are today, regardless of who we are, what kind of English we speak, and what our pasts are. No one chooses where their family is from. And geography plays an important part in how languages are formed and evolve. That's why people in Atlanta speak and use English differently than those in Chicago, or New York, or Los Angeles.

But some locations, and the people who operate in them, are understood as more important than other locations and people. That is, New York is the center of publishing in the US. Los Angeles is the center of the entertainment industry. And the languages used by people in those places have dictated what is standard in them. If we are not thinking slowly enough, we may falsely assume that the languages of those two places are universal, that people in rural Kentucky should speak just like those in Los Angeles, California.

Politics, or the relations of power, is always a part of how we use language, how our languaging is judged, and how we judge others. When we pan back to see a larger swath of history, we find out that it's not hard to see who has had politics on their side. White people have controlled all of the systems and structures, the standards and practices, that create the version of English that has come to be acceptable and most valued in all areas of life.

In order to maintain White language supremacy, or deny that it exists and assume that language is neutral and universal, there are things about language that have to be ignored. The first is that language itself is political. Ignore this fact and it's easier to blame people for the language they speak, call them ignorant, lazy, or dumb, and deny them opportunities in society, all the while saying it's all fair because it's all neutral. We are just trying to put the most qualified and smartest people in the right places, and we are using language, not our racial biases and prejudices, to determine who gets into those places. If you do not ignore the politics of language, you cannot come to this conclusion. But remember, White language supremacy is a condition that has overlapping and redundant structures. There are lots of other things you have to ignore as well, which my story in this book will try to show you.

## SIX HABITS OF WHITE LANGUAGE AND JUDGEMENT

Finally, in this book, I'll reference what I call *habits of White language and judgement*, or habits of White language, HOWL for short. These are the language habits usually assumed or promoted as universally appropriate, correct, or best in writing and speaking by those with power to do so. Historically, these habits of language have come out of elite White racial groups in Western, monolingual,

English speaking societies, as I'll illustrate in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 in various ways. There is nothing inherently racist about these habits of language. However, when they are used as universal standards for communication, used to bestow opportunities and privileges to people, then they become racist and produce White language supremacy.

Using the research on Whiteness, I've found at least six habits that often embody Whiteness as a privileged language position. These six habits of White language and judgement don't always exist at the same time in the same text or language expression, but the first one listed is almost always present in White supremacist expressions.

The presence of one habit in a text or judgement doesn't always equate to being White supremacist or producing White supremacy, but it often can. Usually the difference is in what that instance of language or judgement produces in the places it circulates. Is the outcome of the language or judgement a racially unequal or unfair distribution of resources, jobs, grades, etc.? Does it produce a racialized hierarchy in society? If so, then it is White supremacist.

Understanding when White language supremacy is happening not only helps us understand the consequences of a judgement or decision, but how that judgement or decision is made, how the habits are used to explain or think through language and other judgements. What ideas, values, competencies, or conditions of individuals or groups are assumed to be universal or accessible to all? Claims of universal fairness often fall into this category. They usually sound like: "I treat everyone the same," or "I try to be fair by giving everyone the same opportunity to get X or to do Y." But we are all not the same, nor do we come from the same conditions. We all don't get to run the same race, with the same training, or the same equipment. We don't use the same Englishes, not exactly. And these differences are patterned in groups, because our society has been racially and economically segregated into groups. While he does not frame White language and judgement as habits, nor use such terms, Ibram X. Kendi, in *Stamped From the Beginning*, offers a history of these habits in the racist ideas voiced by influential thinkers, religious leaders, and political figures such as Cotton Mather, Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Sewall, and John Saffin.[14]

Equally important to remember is that the intentions of writers, speakers, or institutions do not matter when determining whether something is White supremacist or racist. Because White language supremacy is a systemic and structural set of conditions that have been created historically, it is not an ethical

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14    The first twelve chapters in Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped From The Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016) are particularly illustrative of how all six habits of White language and judgement were established as common sense, neutral language practices, and compelling ways to use the English language.

blemish to say that someone is reproducing White language supremacy. When we determine that our judgements or decisions reproduce White language supremacy, we are not making any claims about the morality or goodness of people or institutions. We are identifying the way systems work and their biases in order to take responsibility and move forward, change, and make things better tomorrow.

Taking responsibility is an ethical imperative, something we do because we wish to act compassionately. Being to blame for perpetrating some injustice upon others is a judgement that is often understood as a moral failing. Taking responsibility for our world is what we do because it is our world, and the vast majority of us want to make it better for ourselves, for others, and those who come after us.

Here are the six habits of White language and judgement, or HOWL, that I'll reference throughout this book.[15]

- **Unseen, Naturalized Orientation to the World**—This is an orientation, a starting point, of one's body in time and space that makes certain habits, capacities, practices, languages, and ideas reachable. It assumes, or takes as universal, its own proximities or capabilities to act and do things that are inherited through one's shared space. It can be understood as an "oxymoronic haunting,"[16] leaving concepts and ideas unsaid or unstated for those in the classroom or other place to fill in. It is often stated or understood as "clear only if know" (or COIK).[17] The authority figure knows precisely and assumes everyone else does too. When a teacher, writer, or authority embodies this habit, they

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15   Previous versions of HOWL are in: Asao B. Inoue, *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom* (Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse and University Press of Colorado, 2019), 27, 278–279, https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B .2019.0216.0; Asao B. Inoue, "Classroom Writing Assessment as an Antiracist Practice: Confronting White Supremacy in the Judgments of Language," *Pedagogy* 19, no. 3, (October 2019): 373–404, https://doi.org/10.1215/15314200-7615366.

16   See, Tammie M. Kennedy, Joyce Irene Middleton, and Krista Ratcliffe, eds., *Rhetorics of Whiteness: Postracial Hauntings in Popular Culture, Social Media, and Education* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2017), 4–7.

17   A COIK orientation often operates from ambiguous or floating key terms and ideas. For example, in the statement, "Americans are a *free* people," the term "free" floats. It can mean a number of things depending on who you are. COIK orientations leave key ideas or terms floating but assume a universal understanding of them. To read about "floating signifiers," see, Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, trans. Felicity Baker (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 63–64; "Floating Signifier," *Beautiful Trouble*, ed. Andrew Boyd and Dave Oswald Mitchell (OR Books, 2012; repr. https://beautifultrouble.org/theory /floating-signifier/).

often do not realize it, assuming that everyone has access to the same languages, concepts, practices, capacities, histories, and logics that they do. In this way, the classroom, or an ideal paper, or an expected language performance becomes an extension of the White body, its habits, and its languaging in such a way that it is hard to distinguish it as an orientation, body, or space in the classroom or other place. It's just, for instance, a standard that is both associated with but understood as separate from Whiteness and White bodies.[18]

- **Hyperindividualism**—This is a stance or judgement that primarily values self-determination and autonomy as most important or most valued. It often centers or assumes values of the self as an individual, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and self-control, which tend to also support logics like "survival of the fitness," "free and open markets," and competition as proving grounds for discovering the best or what is most ideal. It can appeal to ideals of universal truths and knowledge that come from inside the individual. This personal insight is often understood as universal insight. The logic is that everyone is the same because we are all the same inside, while also holding on to the importance and primacy of the individual, even the individual as the exception. Individual rights and privacy are often most important and construct the common good or what is best in society or groups. Thus the best outcome of a class or an assignment or activity is something personal—a personal grade, a personal insight or learning, a better draft—but not a benefit to the community, group, or class as a whole (that is an indirect, secondary benefit). In this way, the point of society, school, the classroom and its activities is to serve the interests and growth of the individual, not the community.[19]
- **Stance of Neutrality, Objectivity, and Apoliticality**—This is an orientation that assumes or invokes a voice (and body), or its own discourse, as neutral and apolitical, as non-racial and non-gendered. This is often voiced in the style of a "god-trick," which is a universal vantage

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18    I draw on Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2, (2007): 149–168, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139; Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*.

19    For this habit, I draw on, Richard Brookhiser, "The Way of the WASP," in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 16–23; Catherine Myser, "Differences from Somewhere: The Normativity of Whiteness in Bioethics in the United States," *The American Journal of Bioethics* 3, no. 2 (2003): 1–11, https://doi.org/10.1162/152651603766436072; David McGill, and John K. Pearce, "British Families," in *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, ed. Monica McGoldrick, Joe Giordano, and Nydia Garcia-Preto (New York: Guildford Press, 1982), 457–479; DiAngelo, *White Fragility*.

or viewpoint by which to know something else in a nonpolitical or purely objective way. It is a view that is outside the person speaking or expressing the ideas. Often, this stance also manifests as an urge toward universalism, or a one-size-fits-all mentality. Facts are just facts, not created or manufactured by people or processes or language. Contexts are deemphasized or ignored. Ideas, from this orientation, can be outside of the people who articulate them. A rubric or set of language expectations in a classroom, for example is assumed to be apolitical, outside of the gendered and racialized people who made it (and the racialized and classed groups and places those people come from).[20]

- **Individualized, Rational, Controlled Self**—This is a stance or orientation in which the person is conceived of as an individual who is primarily rational, self-conscious, self-controlled, and self-determined. One's own conscience guides the individual. Sight (ocularity) is the primary way to identify the truth or to understand something (i.e. seeing is proof; seeing is understanding; seeing is believing). This makes social and cultural factors into external constraints on the individual, which must always be ignored or overcome. Meaningful issues and questions always lie within the rational self. Individuals have problems, making solutions individually-based. Thus, both success and failure are individual in nature. In a classroom or other space, failure is individual and often seen as weakness or confirmation of inadequacy or a lack of control. Personal control of one's self, body, and voice are important because it shows that the individual is in control and rational. Often part of self-control is the ability to continually work and stay busy or be industrious and productive in approved (or predefined) ways within the system or classroom.[21]
- **Rule-Governed, Contractual Relationships**—This habit focuses on the individual in a contractual relationship with other individuals,

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20    I draw on Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 338–346; Timothy Barnett, "Reading 'Whiteness' in English Studies," *College English* 63, no. 1 (2000): 9–37, https://doi.org/10.2307/379029; Marilyn Frye, "White Woman Feminist," in *Willful Virgin: Essays on Feminism 1976–1992* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1992), 147–169; Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 575–599, https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066; Myser, "Differences from Somewhere."

21    I draw on Brookhiser, "The Way"; Barnett, "Reading 'Whiteness'"; Haraway, "Situated"; Myser, "Differences from Somewhere"; DiAngelo, *White Fragility*.

either formally or tacitly, that tends to be understood as benefiting the individuals in the contract, not the whole community or group. This habit can be seen in syllabi as one kind of assumed social and educational contract that is dictated by those in power (teachers and schools) for the assumed benefit of individual students. Additionally, a focus on or value in "informed consent" (often confirmed in writing) is important. Ideal relationships are understood to negotiate individual needs or individual rights, which are apolitical and universal. Meanwhile, socially-oriented values and questions are less important and often understood as inherently political (and therefore bad or less preferable). There is an importance attached to laws, rules, fairness as sameness and consistency, so fair classrooms and other spaces are understood to be ones that treat every individual exactly the same regardless of who they are, how they got there, where they came from, or what their individual circumstances are. Very little, if any, emphasis is given to interconnectedness with others, relatedness, or feelings in such classrooms or in other arrangements, activities, and relationships. Individuals keep difficulties and problems to themselves because the important thing is the contractual agreement made.[22]

- **Clarity, Order, and Control**—This habit focuses on reason, order, and control as guiding principles for understanding and judgement as well as for documents and instances of languaging. Thinking and anti-sensuality are primary and opposed to feelings and emotions. Logical insight, the rational, order, and objectivity are valued most and opposed to the subjective and emotional. Rigor, order, clarity, and consistency are all valued highly and tightly prescribed, often using a dominant, standardized English language that comes from a White, middle-to-upper-class group of people. Thinking, rationality, and knowledge are apolitical, unraced, and can be objectively displayed. Words, ideas, and language itself are disembodied, or extracted, from the people and their material and emotional contexts from which the language was created or exists. Language can be separated from those who offer it. There is limited value given to sensual experiences, considerations of the body, sensations, and feelings. A belief in scientific method, discovery, and knowledge is often primary, as is a reliance on deductive logics. Other logics that often distinguish this habit in

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22   I draw on David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1999); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Myser, "Differences from Somewhere"; Frye, "White Woman Feminist."

classrooms and other spaces are those that emphasize usefulness or unity and pragmatic outcomes, all of which are predefined for individuals by authorities, such as a teacher.[23]

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23    I draw on hooks, "Representing Whiteness"; Brookhiser, "The Way"; Myser, "Differences from Somewhere"; Barnett, "Reading 'Whiteness.'"