



White Kids: Growing Up with Privilege in a Racially Divided America

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Riveting stories of how affluent, white children learn about race American kids are living in a world of ongoing public debates about race, daily displays of racial injustice, and for some, an increased awareness surrounding diversity and inclusion. In this heated context, sociologist Margaret A. Hagerman zeroes in on affluent, white kids to observe how they make sense of privilege, unequal educational opportunities, and police violence. In fascinating detail, Hagerman considers the role that they and their families play in the reproduction of racism and racial inequality in America.

White Kids, based on two years of research involving in-depth interviews with white kids and their families, is a clear-eyed and sometimes shocking account of how white kids learn about race. In doing so, this book explores questions such as, "How do white kids learn about race when they grow up in families that do not talk openly about race or acknowledge its impact?" and "What about children growing up in families with parents who consider themselves to be 'anti-racist'?"

Featuring the actual voices of young, affluent white kids and what they think about race, racism, inequality, and privilege, *White Kids* illuminates how white racial socialization is much more dynamic, complex, and varied than previously recognized. It is a process that stretches beyond white parents' explicit conversations with their white children and includes not only the choices parents make about neighborhoods, schools, peer groups, extracurricular activities, and media, but also the choices made by the kids themselves. By interviewing kids who are growing up in different racial contexts--from racially segregated to meaningfully integrated and from politically progressive to conservative--this important book documents key differences in the outcomes of white racial socialization across families. And by observing families in their everyday lives, this book explores the extent to which white families, even those with anti-racist intentions, reproduce and reinforce the forms of inequality they say they reject.

White Kids: Growing Up with Privilege in a Racially Divided America Details

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America Margaret A. Hagerman

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Lauren says

I think the most important benefits of reading this book are: the opportunity for white parents to work through their thoughts/issues/shame/guilt in the private space between themselves and the text, and the opportunity to have an external source of information for conversations among white parents who want to interrogate how they and their kids are reifying white supremacy in their own family culture and choices. I'm a white parent, my partner is white, and many of our friends are, of course, also white. All of us are embarking on our first school decisions as our kids age into preschool/kindergarten, and in the context of our relationships it's hard to call each other out on the various forms of coded language and racism that emerge as we talk about these decisions. (Obviously a skill set that needs sharpening, but in the meantime...) The examples offered in this book - both general decisions made by parents and specific comments made by both kids and parents - are helpful for working through our own relationships to similar decisions and conversations. I only wish she had suggested her ideas for how to expand on this research. It's important. My partner and I both read this book in the week before we embarked on touring kindergarten options and great conversations have ensued.

Stephany Snell says

Get your highlighters out folks! Luckily, I read this in the form of an advanced digital copy so, thanks to technology (and the publisher), I was able to mark it up and make notes to my heart's content. *White Kids* is Margaret A. Hagerman's incredibly brave and timely study of a group of children, blessed with enough security that they are less likely to feel directly threatened by the (slow) socioeconomic advancement of people of color. This small, specified sample allowed her to really isolate the concept of race and how society (or at least this particular demographic) regards racial lines, discrimination, etc, both consciously & subconsciously. I have to admit that I stopped after the first couple chapters to Google the author because she was so in tune to what we (people of color) would call microaggressions that I would have sworn she was coming from a place of experiencing that torn feeling when someone says something hurtful or stereotypical and, even though you know they didn't mean anything by it and probably don't even realize that they've said anything wrong, you can't stop the wave of hurt & defensiveness you feel. You guys, I could have cried when I saw her picture. I am always advocating & encouraging people to read & talk to people that don't look anything like them but, the reality is, not everyone does. So, to have someone that looks like Hagerman not just write a book but literally devote years of her life to researching this topic, is huge. I can't remember the last time I've felt so "seen". I may also have a different appreciation than most for this book because of the unique perspective I grew up (and still live) with. My parents were opposite in every way. My mother is white from an educated, affluent family while my father was black from a family that had left sharecropping in Mississippi for the promise of "good" industrial jobs in Michigan. My maternal grandparents live in a home that has been in magazines, belong to a club & sit on various influential boards in multiple states. My paternal grandparents were a cook & a janitor & lived in an area riddled with crime and drugs. I went to a private school where my classmates had pools and planes & then visited my Dad's family where I slept on a pullout couch in the "hood" and looked forward to penny candy and freezee cups. I have been privy to what both demographics say & do when they feel they are "amongst themselves" and have always tried to be a bridge between the two. It often feels like I'm alone in this space because it is rare for a person to have such unfiltered access to one group while also holding an understanding of the other. This author may not have

first person experience in both sects but she is sensitive to both sides in a way I haven't seen before. To say that I appreciate her & her work feels like an understatement. I hope that other people of color read this & not only feel "seen" but also take the opportunity to see the other side & see that, while it isn't an excuse, sometimes people really just don't know any better. At the same time, some DO know better so they're doing better and it does show in the next generation. I'd also love to see white people, particularly those that are or plan to be parents, read this to (hopefully) check the bias & open their eyes to the ways in which they are shaping their children both consciously & subconsciously. It would be an amazing read for parents of multiracial children or children of another race to get an idea of the ways in which the world may look or feel different to your child than it does to you. In other words, *White Kids* is a must read for everyone.... but don't forget your highlighter.

Rt says

Free LibraryThing Early Reviewer book. Hagerman studies wealthy white kids from three Midwest neighborhoods, one of which was basically my neighborhood even though it's halfway across the country. There's the conservative suburb where many white parents use private schools even though they ostensibly moved there for the quality of the public schools; there's the liberal suburb where many white parents move heaven & earth to get their kids into the "good" public school whose racial diversity is (wrongly) perceived to come from the children of immigrant PhD students from the local university; and there's the progressive city neighborhood where many white parents are ideologically committed to public schools, agonize over whether it's fair to give their children outside experiences like trips and tutors, but do it anyway. I felt very seen: that last neighborhood was populated by two types of cars: hybrid cars and cars over 10 years old, often with political bumper stickers (i.e., our last two cars). Part of this story, then, is increasing residential segregation among groups of white people, based on political/cultural differences.

Hagerman argues that kids don't receive racial ideologies unchanged and unchallenged from their parents, but rather do a lot of the work of race-thinking themselves and with peers (and also influenced by media). Especially for the first two groups of white kids, their parents rarely mention race and may even teach that speaking about race—noticing race—is itself racist, even though they also often use racially coded or even explicit language ("ghetto" kids, Hispanic "gang members"). Those kids usually advocated color-blindness but also asked Hagerman lots of questions about race when their parents weren't around, like whether blacks had different muscles that made them better at sports. "Racism" is the worst accusation many white kids can imagine, and it's therefore also a joke (you asked for a marker of a particular color and that makes you racist!). The conservative parents teach color-blind ideology that ends up blaming minorities for their own subordination; the liberal parents teach that discrimination was a problem historically and remains in existence today, but as a matter of individual prejudice rather than structure; and the progressive parents teach that race is one of a number of linked axes along which power and subordination may operate, even as they also teach their kids that they are powerful and entitled to a good life in ways that can reproduce white dominance. There are no good answers, though I have to admit I was impressed by the progressive white kid who talked about protests of Trayvon Martin's death by basically saying that whites' role as allies was to listen and support, not to stand in front trying to lead the protest. I hope there's a lot more of that kid out there.

Sarah says

This book came into my life exactly when I needed it. As I struggle to find a neighborhood and school that balances diversity with a good education, I've found myself using some of the same logic and making some of the same assumptions to justify my top and bottom choices as these parents. Raised in a middle class white family, I've used some of the same coding that the parents use and have struggled with some of the same points. Growing up in a small, rural town with little diversity, I also saw my childhood thoughts reflected in some of these children. I don't want my child to grow up sheltered in a white privileged community because it's important for the development of his worldview that he is surrounded by people of different races and class. While the author didn't explicitly state an answer, she did help me work through my struggle to identify where I want to live and raise my child. All white parents should read this book.

Cat says

Illuminating book to a degree. I am far from affluent but have heard this language my whole life. I'm not perfect, but I am educated to the social issues among minorities in my own community and sure they apply to others. I am familiar with the coded conversations and often hear them among parents, my family and friends, and neighbors. Margaret Hagerman has written a very well researched report, in my opinion. It is certainly worth a read by the folks in those affluent communities (I know way too many of them....) but seriously doubt they'd recognize themselves (or they would, but would argue until they are blue in the face they aren't like that!) Racism is not going away any time soon, it's just gotten a bit more covert.

Just had a thought about "gifted programs"; it's been my experience over the past 30 some odd years that gifted doesn't mean much in any school. I've known so many "gifted" children (now adults) and I can tell you- there was nothing, absolutely nothing, gifted about them. Lower end gifted children were anyone who could sit and follow simple directions in a classroom. High end gifted?- parking cars and delivering pizzas as adults..... so, in my not so humble opinion- gifted programs- hogwash! Just separates kids, whose parents yell the loudest and push the most, from the hoi pollio (poorer children and children of color). The truly gifted? Oh, I work with many of them and they are brilliant, productive adults who amaze me on a daily basis! And most weren't in gifted programs, they come in many colors and ethnic backgrounds and most were moved through school VERY rapidly and completed college very young.

I received a Kindle Arc in exchange for a fair review from Netgalley.

Sarah says

The conversations in this book eerily mirrored the ones I have been having with friends and family around school choice, white privilege, and what our role is or should be in dismantling racist structures. It provided more evidence that how we talk about race with children matters, but more than that--how the choices we make about where to live where our kids go to school shapes how they understand race and racism. A powerful book that holds up a mirror many of us don't want to look into.

Marie says

"Understanding racial matters as an important ideological pillar in the maintenance of white supremacy because it protects a deeply unequal racial status quo by stigmatizing both personal claims of injustice and systematic attempts to mitigate inequality. The tenets of color blind ideology justifies existing racial inequality."

"Private school kids can speak fluently and critically about race and racial inequality in the United States but who simultaneously believe they are better and more deserving than everyone else."

"Films like *The Help* are popular because they represent narratives of racial reconciliation and redemption, which, when consumed, make white people feel good about themselves and the state of race relations today. The film reinforces the color blind of post racial logic that racial injustice is a thing of the past and presents this narrative to white kids as fact."

"The structural privileges of whiteness are what allow white parents to avoid conversations about racial violence perpetrated against youth of color. Parents of black children do not have this luxury as many of them believed it was required of them to help keep their child safe."

"White kids genuinely believe that as white, affluent people they can and will save the world for everyone else. Although these kids are involved in a number of protests and school clubs focused on the issues they care about, these actions rarely lead to actual social change. These actions are in an important sense self serving, helping privileged white kids feel good about themselves and removing any feelings of guilt that they may experience as a result of the privileged lives they lead. they are rarely knowledgeable nor critical of the many unearned advantages they receive in their day to day lives.

"No matter what they do, no matter that they are good white people, they will still inevitably receive the wages of whiteness as long ad the United States continues to be a country organized structurally by race."

Jeff says

I really appreciated the work that Hagerman put into this book. Though I didn't think the subtitle "Growing up with privilege..." accurately describes the content because it's not really about white kids growing up (process/experience)-- it's about their perceptions of others and ultimately how their views change or are cemented early in life. So from that standpoint, it might be a little misleading.

I've spent a lot of time in my life, reading and thinking about racism, trying to understand its existence and implications-- this book reveals so many of the questions and conclusions-- the paradoxes that have arisen in my own thinking.

There are no cut and dried answers here. This is not a 'how to' for parents. Racism runs so deep through our society, as do issues of class and even appearance that solving the problems that prevent understanding,

equality and acceptance of ALL PEOPLE regardless of their differences, will always be a challenge as long as society continues to judge.

This book does an incredible job of analyzing where we are today and how, in spite of the very best intentions, racism is still a very present part of our lives, most definitely defined at a young age. I think it is important to note that this book is not and does not make white people out to be 'evil perpetrators'-- the assumed white superiority or privilege, is looked at and examined in an effort to bridge the inequalities that exist.

I received an arc copy of the book from the publisher through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Stefanie says

"Overall, from my point of view, this has not been a particularly hopeful book."--Margaret A. Hagerman

Can't say I disagree with the author on that, which she writes in one part of her conclusion to this book. Nonetheless, this is a fascinating, timely study on how rich white kids in three different neighborhoods in a Midwestern city formulate their racial understandings - and it's an illuminating exploration of where we stand, if not necessarily where to go from here.

This is a book/study with a goal in mind, though that wasn't apparent to me until some significant way into it. Hagerman's interest is in how much (or how little) these white kids and their families begin to understand structural racism and act against it - something that, as people at the top of the American power structure they are uniquely able to do, but conversely, also stand to lose the most as a result of.

I've got nothing against that goal - in fact, I'm very interested in and supportive of it - but I picked up this book initially for more of a personal reason: even though I didn't grow up affluent, by my definition or this book's, I wanted to use it to reflect on my own upbringing as a white kid in the Midwest. And also perhaps for some guidance should I become a parent...with my future family and kid(s) very likely to fit into the affluent group Hagerman was looking at.

This is where the book is not so hopeful: none of the three groupings of families in the study, no matter how racially conscious they or their kids were, was fully able to escape engaging in practices and sometimes statements that relied on their privilege. Hagerman describes the "difficult paradox" of affluent white parents this way: "in order to be a 'good parent' they must provide their children with as many opportunities as possible; in order to be a 'good citizen' they must resist evoking structural privileges in ways that disadvantage others."

So sorry: still no good answers on resolving that one. (Spoiler alert?)

However, as an exploration of what kind of context produces certain kinds of racial understandings, this book is quite clarifying. Hagerman talks and works with kids from three different neighborhoods: the conservative suburb of Sheridan, the politically mixed neighborhood of Wheaton Hills, and the left/liberal neighborhood of Evergreen. Through the course of six chapters, which look at neighborhood/school choice, private schools, peer and sibling interactions, volunteering and vacationing, family race talk and

understandings from the kids themselves, Hagerman slowly draws out how these factors work to develop either a "colorblind" / "if you work hard you get ahead" race understanding, or one that is race conscious and aware of societal and structural factors.

Hagerman is quite intentional throughout to show that kids don't just absorb the messages they are given from their parents and other factors around them, and cites several examples where they push back and question. Ultimately, though - and this is especially apparent since she was able to go back and talk with some of them four years later - most of the kids end up adopting the racial understanding of their parents / surrounding context. So read that chapter on neighborhood / school choice closely! It's quite meaty; there's a reason Hagerman places it first.

This isn't a "pop science" book; it's pretty close to an academic style of writing (I was constantly flipping to read the footnotes). And while I really would have enjoyed reading more anecdotes about and direct quotes from the kids themselves, this book was compelling enough that I read it over one weekend. Recommended for those interested in racial justice topics, and for grown-up white kids who want insight on how their upbringing may have influenced them even today.

Lindsay Wilcox says

I received a free copy of this e-book via Netgalley.

I'm a teacher, and in my years in the classroom, I have taught in wildly different environments. A couple of my schools had mostly black students by design, but the others were heavily white. All were private schools. I'm black, so I've navigated these varied spaces with my own form of privilege: I don't need to see people who have the same color skin as I do to feel like I belong, and yet I know that racial "color blindness" isn't a thing. I might be comfortable in white spaces, but that doesn't mean I don't know those spaces are white.

White people may not usually face racism to the extent that non-white people do, but that doesn't mean that race doesn't apply to them. Being the racial majority affords its own obvious privileges, which Hagerman does an excellent job of detailing and cataloguing. For middle-schoolers, the task of identity formation is even more difficult than it might be otherwise. Because they live in a world where—like it or not—race matters, they also have to figure out how race factors into their identities. I was intrigued to read the detailed stories and quotations in this book from people who are in the majority and are still making choices and building lives in a racially-driven society.

I found myself nodding along through much of the book. It's a shame that some white people who inhabit mostly all-white spaces think that the mere act of discussing race is racist in and of itself. It's a paradox that the people who benefit the most from racial structures in society (such as generational wealth) have the most interest in protecting those structures (to maintain their wealth) as well as the most agency to change them (which might threaten their wealth or opportunities). It's understandable to want what's best for your kids and to do whatever is necessary in order to help them prosper, but it makes a big difference when you started out with a lot yourself.

Hagerman doesn't offer many solutions to the problem of building race-consciousness in early adolescents, but she paints rich pictures of real people's lives. Racial stereotypes are caricatures, so they can only carry the discussion so far. Her work offers us round characters from the white side of the tracks in a world where more minority actors are stepping into the spotlight. Let's see how the action unfolds.

Shraddha Chakradhar says

What a fantastic book. Very heavy subject, of course, but I would say this is essential reading for every parent (or wannabe parent). Although the book focuses exclusively on White families, I think families of other races who also tend to be among the privileged/affluent in this country (Asian Americans, for instance) could also really benefit from some of the insights into how picking a neighborhood with the “best” schools may not always be best in terms of bridging the racial divide in this country. It doesn’t seem conducive to raising race-and-privilege-conscious children to have them be in either private schools or schools that are reputed to be the “best,” as these schools also tend to be overwhelmingly white.

The question we come back to over and over is, “How do you balance the best interests of *your* child with the best interests of all children in society?” It’s a fascinating question (with not very clear-cut answers), but if people from privileged backgrounds begin to think beyond their own child/children, we’d already be taking a step in the right direction.

Mrs. Europaea says

In *White Kids*, Hagerman seeks to understand what white children growing up in the current political climate are experiencing and how growing up in this will affect their power and influence as adults. I can go into detail about Hagerman's research to study children on their journey throughout middle school. An age when children begin thinking in ideological terms and start to consider others around them in new ways. But really, just look at the news from any time during the last 1 year, 188 days, 9 hours, 50 minutes since Trump took office and you can see that Hagerman is addressing a widespread problem in "white culture" that begins at an early age.

I'm going to put this right here.

Some of these kids believe that talking about race "makes you racist," while other children think white people need to talk and think carefully about race much more often. Some children think that black people have "extra muscles" that make them jump higher, while other children think this is absurd. While some of these children believe people get rich because they work hard, some have other ideas about the causes of social stratification.

Yes, she is talking about children but there are grown ass adults out there that believe this stuff. IF that doesn't frighten you enough to read this book then I don't know what will.

Rainey says

While the interviews conducted herein yielded responses that were expected, I feel that this book is a valuable read for parents- particularly parents who think that an appropriate way to avoid racism is to avoid talking about race with their children. I view much of this content as a great reminder of what NOT to do when talking to your kids about race.

Mary says

There is a lot to unpack in this book. I am a person who grew up in a very white community, and I know I had many of the same thoughts as some of these kids. As I age and raise a child of color, I am striving to expose her to a more diverse world, learn about and share in her culture, and even use my privilege to benefit her. I chose a school district that could be more diverse but has more than many in the area.

On to the book. As an adult learning and being open to learn and listen and HEAR of other's lived experiences, I found myself frustrated with many of these kids and their parents. Raising "colorblind" kids does not help anyone.

This is an important book. I feel it should be required reading for many different groups (teachers, adoptive parents, community leaders, etc).

Chris says

Fascinating commentary from rich white kids and their parents about race. Of the many messages in this book, I'll most remember the pervasiveness of the "colour blind" myth/lie, the belief by some people that they "don't see race." It's not just a harmless self-deception; that belief prevents people from seeing the racism in front of their faces, prevents them from seeing injustice everywhere, and let's them pretend racism is a thing of the past.

Hagerman notes that the kids she studied had both race and class privilege. I'd love to see similar studies of white kids in lower and middle income brackets.
