



## Words

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I've been thinking a lot about words lately, and language, encouraged by the indomitable Rev. Dr. Velda Love in the Sacred Conversations to End Racism Fall Institute.

I've been thinking about [the characteristics of white supremacy culture](#), and how "worship of the written word" is included on the list. I've been thinking about who controls what can be published and who decides who can even learn to write.

I've been thinking about what Robin DiAngelo calls the "good/bad binary," and how many times I've become defensive (also on the above list) when asked to question my frame or motive or language.

I've been thinking about Rev. Dr. Love's prophetic insistence that there is no "white space" or "black space" --only God's space. That saying I am a person of European descent speaks truth more clearly than saying I am white, because "white" was an invention to create a hierarchy of power and privilege.

In the Our Whole Lives and Sexuality and Our Faith ministry, we encourage adults and youth to think through conversations and decisions about sexuality using values like respect, relationship, self-worth, and responsibility. Having these values as a frame helps people to be courageous with uncomfortable discussions.

Rev. Cedric Harmon encouraged an Our Whole Lives webinar audience to also use these values when framing conversations about race. Recognizing that many people of European descent find conversations about race to be uncomfortable, he urged us to recognize we already have the tools, and we can and must find the words. Uncomfortable isn't a valid reason to avoid lifesaving discussions.

Our words matter.

Too many people who enjoy hierarchy and privilege continue to use words to

wound and harm. An obvious example is a national leader saying not to be afraid of COVID after receiving personalized medical treatment, being silent about the 215,000 plus U.S. deaths from coronavirus, and simultaneously working to take health care away from millions of Americans.

Not as obvious to many of us who are of European descent is that we participate, intentionally or unintentionally, in microaggressions, microinsults and microinvalidations towards people of African, Asian, Latinx and Native descent all day, every day.

We all assign meaning to words. Isabel Wilkerson says in *Caste: the Origins of Our Discontents*, "...the letters of the alphabet are neutral and meaningless until they are combined to make a word, which itself has no significance until it is inserted into a sentence and interpreted by those who speak or hear it."

When we assign meaning to words, they become habits in our thinking and understanding. Changing habits requires time, attention, and commitment. Changing how we make meaning out of the chaos and inequity that confronts us, requires a commitment to spending time and attention on understanding how our words uphold or work to dismantle white supremacy.

There are many ways to continue to do this. Today, I invite you to join me in the [21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge](#), to "do one action for 21 days to further your understanding of power, privilege, supremacy, oppression and equity."

Because words matter, and how we use them is literally a matter of life and death.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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