

Danger of a Single Story

- Grew up on a university campus in eastern Nigeria
- Early reader → British and American children's books
- Wrote about what she was reading → white and blue-eyed characters, played in the snow, ate apples, talked about the weather
 - Kinda like algorithms? Only are able to make decisions based on information
- Never been outside Nigeria
- How impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children
- Discovered African books → weren't many available
- Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye → shift in perception
- Conventional middle-class Nigerian family
 - Father was a professor, mother was an administrator
 - Live-in domestic help
 - House boy named Fide
 - Mother said their family was very poor
 - Felt pity
 - "Their poverty was my single story of them"
 - Bias in the media -- information from only one source/a set of biased sources
- Left Nigeria to go to university in the United States -- 19
 - Spoke English, roommate was confused -- wanted to listen to "tribal music" but she listened to Mariah Carey, assumed she did not know how to use a stove
 - What struck me was this: She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa: a single story of catastrophe. In this single story, there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way, no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals.
- Before going to the US, did not consciously identify as African, but everyone associated her with Africa
 - Embraced this new identity
- After spending time in the US, realized how people would perceive Africa "from a single story"
 - Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner. I would see Africans in the same way that I, as a child, had seen Fide's family.
- Story of Africa is shaped by Western literature

- John Lok -- referred to Africans as “beasts who have no houses, ... They are also people without heads, having their mouth and eyes in their breasts.”
- His writing represents a tradition of Sub-Saharan Africa as a place of negatives, of difference, of darkness, of people who, in the words of the wonderful poet Rudyard Kipling, are “half devil, half child.”
- Professor said that her novel was not “authentically African”
 - The professor told me that my characters were too much like him, an educated and middle-class man. My characters drove cars. They were not starving. Therefore they were not authentically African.
- Guilty of the single story of Mexico
 - Mexicans fleecing the healthcare system, sneaking across the border, being arrested, etc.
 - I remember walking around on my first day in Guadalajara, watching the people going to work, rolling up tortillas in the marketplace, smoking, laughing. I remember first feeling slight surprise. And then, I was overwhelmed with shame. I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind, the abject immigrant. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans and I could not have been more ashamed of myself.
- The single story is associated with power
 - Nkali, an Igbo word → noun that loosely translates to “to be greater than another”
 - Like our economic and political worlds, stories are defined by the principle of nkali: how they are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power
 - Power is the ability to make a story the definitive story of that person, not just to tell another person’s story
 - Mourid Barghouti, Palestinian poet -- if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, “secondly”
- Writers were expected to have had really unhappy childhoods to be successful
 - Had a very happy childhood, full of laughter and love, in a very close-knit family
- But I also had grandfathers who died in refugee camps. My cousin Polle died because he could not get adequate healthcare. One of my closest friends, Okoloma, died in a plane crash because our fire trucks did not have water. I grew up under repressive military governments that devalued education, so that sometimes, my parents were not paid their salaries. And so, as a child, I saw jam disappear from the breakfast table, then margarine disappeared, then bread became too expensive, then milk became rationed. And most of all, a kind of normalized political fear invaded our lives.
- The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem isn’t that they are untrue, it is that they are incomplete
 - Robs people of dignity, makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult, emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar

- "Oppression describes a set of policies, practices, traditions, norms, definitions, and explanations (discourses), which function to systematically exploit one social group to the benefit of another social group" (Sensory and DiAngelo, 2012, p. 39).
- What the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe calls "a balance of stories"

English - Apr 21, 2020

Malcolm Gladwell's Revisionist History Carlos Doesn't Remember

- 1) Malcolm Gladwell's *Revisionist History* - "Carlos doesn't remember." This episode is actually the first of three about a more broad topic. You're welcome to listen to more than the first but the first is all that's required for our discussion.
<http://revisionisthistory.com/episodes/04-carlos-doesnt-remember>

During or after you listen to the podcast, please jump into [this shared google doc](#) that will continue our investigation of craft. In this case we'll take a look at when and how Gladwell uses **narrative, inform & explain, and argument** to construct essays. Please also have this complete by **Tuesday**.

- Carlos
 - Finished classwork earlier than other kids
 - Very deliberate for a teenager → transferred from a public high school to an elite private school
 - Likes math -- enjoys understanding things -- precise
 - Scholarship -- is excelling
- Capitalization: the percentage of people in any group that are able to reach their potential
 - Way to capture how successful and just a civilized society is
- Americans have told themselves that they are good at capitalization -- that it's what sets them apart from everywhere else
 - Reevaluate this idea, is it true that we are good at capitalization
- Met Carlos through Eric Eisner
 - Used to be a big shot entertainment lawyer
 - Started a program for gifted kids in Los Angeles called Yes
- Felt self conscious -- but not because he was hispanic
 - Difference in wealth
 - Episode with the sneakers
 - Teachers called Eric to tell them that Carlos wasn't playing with the other kids at recess
 - Noticed his sneakers were three sizes too big -- bought him the right sneakers
 - Doesn't remember the sneakers -- happens a lot

- Capitalization system is complicated for people like Carlos
 - Requires an Eric Eisner -- how many Eric Eisners are there?
- You can't just jump into areas of opportunity and leave your past behind, your past comes with you
- Hoxby and Avery published a paper called the Missing One-Offs
 - 10 years ago -- some elite US colleges announced they would give free tuition to any deserving student from the bottom of the economic ladder
 - Used to be 40,000, now it is 65,000
 - Nothing much happened
 - Ended up taking in an additional 15 students out of 1600
 - There aren't a lot of poor smart kids -- kids like Carlos are rare
 - They decide to fact check this
 - Go to College Board to get the database of test scores
 - Take scores and match them to location → Map
 - Discover a huge number of poor smart kids -- 35,000 who score in 90th percentile and from families with less than 40,000
- Eric Eisner started Yes in Lennox -- small heavily hispanic community of about 20,000 people
 - Median household income is 37,000 per year
- Lennox Middle School has 600 students per grade -- looks like a concentration camp
- 6 narrow confinement cells to hold kids until the cops come (a middle school) -- feeling of hopelessness
 - Go to any school in a disadvantaged community and you can pretty reliably find gifted students
 - "It's not like you're looking for a needle in a haystack"
- Why aren't these smart poor kids showing up in places like Harvard
 - Most don't even apply
 - Elite school is cheaper than state colleges
- System can't find kids like Carlos because it is looking much too late
 - High school juniors -- 17 year olds
 - Eric Eisner says you need to start looking in the 4th grade
 - If the excitement of being smart isn't encouraged, it goes away because when the struggle hits they don't have the beliefs for that anymore
 - They aren't accustomed to it
- 80% of smart boys become gang-affiliated by the 8th grade
- No high school in Lennox, need to go one town over to Hawthorne which means crossing gang lines
 - The number of smart poor kids is low because it is based on a number of high school seniors that took the ACT or SAT -- must've made it to the end of high school and completed one of these tests
- Capitalization rate in Lennox? Need to cross a gang line
- Ideology of talent -- hard and resilient, tangible shiny thing
 - To find and encourage talent, all you need to do is ensure the right doors are open
 - Raise your hand and say over here, and the talent will come running
 - Talent is really, really fragile

- Carlos gets a full ride scholarship to one of the most exclusive private high schools in the country
 - He's not all set
 - Wanted to go to boarding school but couldn't go
 - Carlos has a little sister
- Summer before high school -- were put into foster homes -- living away from their mother which took an emotional toll
- Selective memory -- weren't a lot of good things happening
- "I definitely still tried in school, I didn't let it affect my grades too much"
 - Puts everything else in a box, needed to take care of everything
- 4 homes -- for a time was separated from his little sister
- Carlos' mother is in prison -- tells them to detach themselves
- Difference between being privileged and being poor in America, it's how many chances you get
 - Disruption is not fatal for life chances
 - Privilege buys you second chances
 - If you're from a community like Lennox, privilege doesn't buy you second chances
- These kids from an early age learn where the exits are and they don't let anything get in the way
- Carlos is lucky -- the foster care situation works out, he forgets, he reestablishes contact with Eric
- This story isn't inspirational
- Capitalization of talent is such an issue -- these are wrong odds
- "Were you ever pessimistic"
 - Overwhelmed
- "Honestly, I never thought of him as someone that gives up. I was never worried about him."

Viet Thanh Nguyen's essay: "In Trump's Vision of a White America Immigrants should be Grateful and Servile."

- 2) Viet Thanh Nguyen's essay: "In Trump's Vision of a White America Immigrants should be Grateful and Servile. Nguyen is the author of *The Sympathizer* and *The Refugees*. You can also read many of his essays on his website if you are interested in his writing style or his opinions.
<https://vietnguyen.info/2019/in-trumps-vision-of-a-white-america-immigrants-should-be-grateful-and-servile-2>
- Immigrants, refugees and people of color have always recognized Trumpism for what it is -- a politics of nostalgia for an era of unquestioned white superiority and power.
 - "Docile compliance, with the implicit sequel of servitude."
 - Nuance is not part of Trump's rhetoric or his vision of America.

- Confronted by women of color who are not performing the gratitude and servitude he expects, he has made his own best case for even the most hesitant white people to recognize how white supremacy underlies his vision: “If they don’t like it here, they can leave.”
- This phrase implies that the four members of Congress do not belong to the United States
 - Even though three of them -- Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts — were born here. (The fourth, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, came here from Somalia as a girl and became a citizen.)
- Trump is creating a situation where white people must choose: Be critical of their own whiteness or embrace it wholeheartedly
 - The fact that so many white people immediately recognized his racism is one good thing that has come out of this controversy, proof that they can identify and resist white supremacy.
- Trump’s appeal to a core group of Americans speaks to an uncomfortable truth in American history
 - America is a country founded on the white racism of colonization, genocide, slavery, and immigrant exploitation
- What Trump wants is the America of the late 19th century, when Congress passed the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the first time it targeted a racial group for immigration exclusion
- Now white people have to confront their whiteness. Some understand that it entails white privilege and that if we are to have a more just society, some of that privilege must be given up. Others deny that white privilege exists and retreat even further into a defensive whiteness, which results, in its extreme, in white supremacy.
 - White middle-class and working-class identity formed, attached to varying degrees of economic prosperity, culminating in the election of the Irish descendant John F. Kennedy. This is the white privilege that results from getting into this country, getting jobs and other benefits that nonwhite people and women could not get, and claiming a forgetful Americanness, amnesiac about its origins.
 - White privilege & oppression?
- A fusion of white supremacy and promised economic liberty is what Trump believes will repair the “American carnage” he identified in his inauguration speech
 - “Contradiction from a man of contradictions”
 - Accuses the congresswomen of coming from places that are “a complete and total catastrophe . . . totally broken and crime infested,” but these are the same characteristics of a stricken America that he promised to fix
- Trump’s vision is based on a fiction despite the reality of America with household tragedies such as divorce, violence, homophobia, mental illness, unemployment and drug abuse
- For many immigrants, their new home in America is often as much a place of discomfort, even torment, as one of love and belonging

- "To truly make America great requires the paradoxical ability to see that America as a home has always been imperfect. To make America a home for everyone means acknowledging that home is what we love and fear, what we remake and renovate."
- To progress, we must redefine home and who belongs to it. While Trump wants to separate us into white Americans and everyone else, we must forge connections among people who do not look or think alike.
- This is our American home. Passions are high, voices are loud, but this is the reality: Home is where we are, home is what we claim, and no one can tell us to go home if we are already at home.

Ibram X. Kendi's personal narrative essay at the introduction of his book *How to be an Antiracist*

- 3) Ibram X. Kendi's personal narrative essay at the introduction of his book [How to be an Antiracist](https://www.ibramxkendi.com/essays-1). You can read more Kendi if you're interested here: <https://www.ibramxkendi.com/essays-1> I first came across him in an interview with the CBC, which I'm sure you can google.
- Suit-wearing, tie-choking, hat-flying church folk
 - January 17, 2000, more than three thousand Black people -- with a smattering of White folks -- arrived that Monday morning in their Sunday best at the Hylton Memorial Chapel in Northern Virginia
 - Made it to the final round of the Prince William County Martin Luther King Jr. oratorical contest
 - Unlike other competitors with a white collar under a dark suit and a matching dark tie, wore a racy golden-brown blazer with a slick black shirt and a bright color-streaked tie underneath -- black slacks and creamy boots
 - Parents, Carol and Larry, were all smiles nonetheless
 - Competitors were academic prodigies -- he wasn't, carried a GPA lower than 3.0, SAT score barely cracked 1000 -- "I was riding the high of having received surprise admission letters from the two colleges I'd halfheartedly applied to"
 - Dad came into the gym, embarrassing him before what they would call the "White judge" -- dad couldn't care less what judgmental White people thought about him
 - Rarely if ever put on a happy mask, faked a calmer voice, hid his opinion, or avoided making a scene
 - "I loved and hated my father for living on his own terms in a world that usually denies Black people their own terms."
 - Admitted to Hampton University in southern Virginia
 - Thought he was too dumb for college -- intelligence is as subjective as beauty
 - Kept using "objective" standards like test scores and report cards to judge himself
 - "Maybe if I'd read history then, I'd have learned about the historical significance of the new town my family had moved to from New York City in 1997. I would have learned about all those Confederate memorials surrounding me in Manassas,

Virginia, like Robert E. Lee's dead army. I would have learned why so many tourists trek to Manassas National Battlefield Park to relive the glory of the Confederate victories at the Battles of Bull Run during the Civil War. It was there that General Thomas J. Jackson acquired his nickname, "Stonewall," for his stubborn defense of the Confederacy. Northern Virginians kept the stonewall intact after all these years. Did anyone notice the irony that at this Martin Luther King Jr. oratorical contest, my free Black life represented Stonewall Jackson High School?

- "Even now I wonder if it was my poor sense of self that first generated my poor sense of my people/ Or was it my poor sense of my people that inflamed a poor sense of myself"
 - The answer is less important than the cycle it describes
 - Racist ideas make people of color think less of themselves, which makes them more vulnerable to racist ideas
 - Racist ideas make White people think more of themselves, which further attracts them to racist ideas
- Thought the reason for his subpar academic performance was rooted in his race -- media perpetuated this image
 - "They think it's okay not to think!" I charged, raising the classic racist idea that Black youth don't value education as much as their non-Black counterparts
 - Crowd encouraged his unproven and disproven racist ideas about the things wrong with Black youth
- "In my applause-stoked flights of oratory, I didn't realize that to say something is wrong about a racial group is to say something is inferior about a racial group. I did not realize that to say something is inferior about a racial group is to say a racist idea."
 - The Black judge seemed to be eating it up and clapping me on my back for more. I kept giving more.
- "A racist culture had handed me the ammunition to shoot Black people, to shoot myself, and I took and used it. Internalized racism is the real Black on Black crime.
- Long before he became president, Donald Trump liked to say, "Laziness is a trait in Blacks."
- Denial is the heartbeat of racism, beating across ideologies, races, and nations. It is beating within us. Many of us who strongly call out Trump's racist ideas will strongly deny our own.
- The problem with being "not racist" is that it is a claim that signifies neutrality: "I am not a racist, but neither am I aggressively against racism."
 - But there is no neutrality in the racism struggle
 - The opposite of "racist" isn't "not racist", it is "anti-racist"
 - One endorses either the idea of a racial hierarchy as racist, or racial inequality as an antiracist
 - One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an anti-racist
 - One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist

- The only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it and then dismantle it
- “The language of color blindness -- like the language of “not racist” -- is a mask to hide racism”
 - Fails to see racism and falls into racist passivity
 - Ignoring the problem does not solve it
- “The good news is that racist and antiracist are not fixed identities. We can be a racist one minute and an antiracist the next. What we say about race, what we do about race, in each moment determines what -- not who -- we are.”
- “We know how to be racist. We know how to pretend to be not racist. Now let’s know how to be antiracist.”

The Other Problematic Outbreak

As the coronavirus spreads across the globe, so too does racism.

- Eunice -- Hong Kong woman living in New York City
 - Wore a face mask to protect herself and other people
 - She began experiencing multiple forms of xenophobia
 - People distancing themselves from her on public transit or making racist comments -- including a death threat
 - “Every time something like this happens to me, I always have a fleeting thought of, like, *Should I not go out in a mask anymore?*” she said. “I should not have to choose my safety over my health.”
- Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, reports of racism toward East Asian communities have grown apace
 - Has expanded beyond East Asian populations: Thailand’s public-health minister appeared to lash out at white foreigners who he said were dirty and spreading the virus in the country, adding that people should be more afraid of Westerners than Asians
 - Countering racism with more racism
 - A tangential idea to the ideas in the third text
- During the yellow-fever epidemic in the United States in 1853, European immigrants were the primary targets of stigmatization
- During the SARS outbreak, East Asians bore the brunt
- When the Ebola outbreak emerged in 2014, Africans were targeted
- For this reason, the World Health Organization opted against denoting a geographic location when naming the new virus
 - Ebola -- after the river in the Congo
 - 2012 Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS)
- “Stigma, to be honest, is more dangerous than the virus itself,” Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO director-general, stated recently. Still, some media outlets and U.S. leaders continue to refer to the disease as the “Wuhan virus.”

- As the coronavirus spreads, the xenophobia it foments quickly intertwines with the political conditions in the countries it touches
- “To associate a disease with a group of people and believe that banishing, quarantining, and segregating members of this group would be a sound protective measure will only distract us from the real threat,” says Minnie Li, a sociology lecturer at the Education University of Hong Kong -- born in Shanghai
 - One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an anti-racist
 - The single story robs people of dignity, makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult, emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar
- Travel bans and border closures aren’t always effective, but while governments primarily impose these limitations to slow the spread of the virus, they also do so to reduce panic among the population



- The response to the virus is worse than the virus itself
 - Stories drive exaggerated responses directed towards groups of people
 - Masks the true problem

How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them - Verna Myers

- This violence, this brutality against black men has been going on for centuries. I mean, it's the same story. It's just different names. It could have been Amadou Diallo. It could have been Sean Bell. It could have been Oscar Grant. It could have been Trayvon Martin.

- This violence, this brutality, is really something that's part of our national psyche. It's part of our collective history. What are we going to do about it? You know that part of us that still crosses the street, locks the doors, clutches the purses, when we see young black men? That part.
 - Article #2 -- ignoring history -- confronting it
- Three things to overcome our biases
 - Get out of denial
 - Stop trying to be good people
 - Be real people
 - They're like, "Oh, Ms. Diversity Lady, we're so glad you're here" -- (Laughter) -- "but we don't have a biased bone in our body." And I'm like, "Really? Because I do this work every day, and I see all my biases."
 - Racist vs antiracist
 - But it appears that when things get funky and a little troublesome, a little risky, I lean on a bias that I didn't even know that I had.
 - Implicit association test, measures unconscious bias, taken by five million people -- default is white
 - "I'm just going to double down on my color blindness. Yes, I'm going to recommit to that. I'm going to suggest to you, no. We've gone about as far as we can go trying to make a difference trying to not see color. The problem was never that we saw color. It was what we did when we saw the color. It's a false ideal. And while we're busy pretending not to see, we are not being aware of the ways in which racial difference is changing people's possibilities, that's keeping them from thriving, and sometimes it's causing them an early death."
 - Don't try and be colourblind, look at awesome black people
 - Move toward young black men instead of away from them
 - Biases are the stories we make up about people before we know who they actually are
 - The incomplete story -- stereotype
 - I'm saying go deeper, closer, further, and build the kinds of relationships, the kinds of friendships that actually cause you to see the holistic person and to really go against the stereotypes.
 - When we see something, we have to have the courage to say something, even to the people we love.