

White Privilege

This and the next two classes are led by Aja Riggs, the lead trainer of the course Exploring Whiteness: Unlearning Racism and Understanding Privilege. The course helps white people (and others who benefit from white skin privilege) to see, understand and counter racism—within ourselves, our organizations, and the structures of our society.

Class Assignments

1. **5 Things You Should Know About Racism** – Decoded – MTV News, 6:17 minute video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eTWZ80z9EE>
2. **Understanding My Privilege** | Sue Borrego | TEDxPasadenaWomen, 12:48 minute video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIRxqC0Sze4>
3. **What is White Privilege**, short read. <https://www.ywcampsls.org/all-our-voices-blog/white-privilege-101/>
4. **White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack** - Peggy McIntosh, short read <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>
5. **How to recognize your white privilege — and use it to fight inequality**, Peggy McIntosh, 18:26 minute video https://www.ted.com/talks/peggy_mcintosh_how_to_recognize_your_white_privilege_and_use_it_to_fight_inequality?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare
6. **Four Forms of Racism** - Grassroots Policy Project, 1 page (attached)
7. **Aamer Rahman (Fear of a Brown Planet) - Reverse Racism**, 2:48 comedy video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dw_mRaIHb-M
8. For white people – **notice white privilege**. As you go about your life this week see if you can notice how white privilege operates around you and within you. See if you can spot it at least once a day. Notice when and where you become aware of it. What prompts you to be aware of it? How do you feel about it when you notice? Take notes if that will help you to remember.

Goal for Class

The overall goal of these three sessions is to expand our awareness of what it means to be white in a racist society.

The goal of this particular class is to deepen our understanding of white privilege and sharpen our ability to identify how racism and white privilege impact all aspects of our society, as well as ourselves as individuals.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is one of the ways that white privilege has shaped or impacted your life?
2. How do you feel about having white privilege (if you are white)? When you talk about it, face it and name it what happens in your body? If you are not white, consider sharing how it feels to interact with white people when we don't recognize our privilege.

Additional Resource

- **White Identity Development Models** (attached)

Section 3: Racialization and Forms of Racism

Racialization shapes an institution so that as part of its normal functioning, and without anyone having a consciously racist intention, it produces disparities in outcome by race. A prime example of this is the way in which our criminal justice system has evolved. In general, officials avoid saying or doing things that are overtly racist. As long as the system appears to be operating 'normally,' many people do not perceive racism in the system, and many will resist any arguments that point out racial bias in criminal justice practices. And yet, racial disparities abound, in policing, in sentencing, in attitudes about the criminality of youth of color, and in profiling.

Different forms of racism

- *Interpersonal*: This refers to prejudices and discriminatory behaviors where one group makes assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intents of other groups based on race. This set of prejudices leads to cruel intentional or unintentional actions towards other groups.
- *Internalized*: In a society in which all aspects of identity and experience are racialized, and one group is politically, socially and economically dominant, members of stigmatized groups, who are bombarded with negative messages about their own abilities and intrinsic worth, may internalize those negative messages. It holds people back from achieving their fullest potential. It also obscures the structural and systemic nature of racial oppression, and reinforces those systems.
- *Institutional*: Where assumptions about race are structured into the social and economic institutions in our society. Institutional racism occurs when organizations, businesses, or institutions like schools and police departments discriminate, either deliberately or indirectly, against certain groups of people to limit their rights. This type of racism reflects the cultural assumptions of the dominant group.
- *Structural*: This refers to the accumulation over centuries of the effects of a racialized society. Think again about the creation of the white middle class and what it means today to have been left out of that process of wealth-creation, home ownership, college education, etc.

The critical aspect of racism that we must address today is the accumulation and incorporation of long-standing racialized practices into all of our social and economic structures, or **structural racism**. Think again about that 'post-racial society' idea. If race no longer matters, how do we explain persistent disparities among groups, and disproportionate levels of poverty, incarceration, unemployment, etc. in communities of color. We can't. Not without a structural racism analysis.

Facilitators' Note: *The following two activities help illustrate the effects of structural racism. The activity "Step Up, Step Back" works best if you have a group of 20 or more people that is racially, ethnically, culturally and economically diverse: African American, immigrant, white, working class, middle class, etc.*

White Identity Development Models

Based on the White Identity Development Models of Beverley Tatum, Janet Helms, Megan Lietz, John and Joy Hoffman and Jal Metha.

White identity development models (similar to other identity development models focusing on people from non-dominant groups) outline some of the typical phases that white people go through as we become more aware of our racial identity in a racist society. Understanding this not only helps us recognize and normalize our own experience, it can also help us be more effective in meeting other white people where they are and helping them to their next step of awareness. Although these generalized stages are presented sequentially, our personal development rarely happens in a strictly linear way.

“The task for Whites is to develop a positive White identity based in reality, not on assumed superiority. In order to do that each person must become aware of his or her whiteness, accept it as personally and socially significant, and learn to feel good about it, not in the sense of a Klan member’s “white pride,” but in the context of a commitment to a just society.” Dr. Janet Helms

1. Unawareness

We feel that we are just regular people, normal and average. We do not usually think about our race or color. When we are aware of it, we do not think it means very much.

We may think things like “race doesn’t matter,” or “I don’t see race.”

We believe the negative (and positive) stereotypes that we absorb from the people around us, the media, etc.

We may be curious about people of color, or fear people of other races.

We are not aware that we sometimes say things that are racist or act in racist ways.

We think of racism as prejudice. We don’t understand how cultural and institutional racism or white privilege works.

We unconsciously believe that our (white) values and norms are superior. We believe that white standards of dress, appearance, speech, attitudes and ways of doing things are positive and correct.

2. Awareness

We begin to see that race does matter and that racism is a problem. We begin to realize how much people of color are affected by racism.

We become aware that we are white and that our race matters in how we are treated.

We realize that we have prejudices and biases, and that we act in racist ways without meaning to.

We may feel uncomfortable, confused, disoriented, guilty or ashamed. Or betrayed, lied to and angry. Or sad, depressed, overwhelmed, hopeless, numb or disengaged.

3. Hesitation

We may fear that speaking out or acting against racism will have costs. We may be afraid of being rejected by other white people.

We may try to distance ourselves from white people as a group, saying “But I am an individual. I don’t do those things!”

We may want to be seen as a “good white person” and put down other white people, for fear of being seen as racist.

We may try to identify with some other marginalized group, or focus on the ways we are disadvantaged, to avoid dealing with our white privilege.

Or Retreat

We may find the feelings that this awareness brings up, or the difficulty of challenging racism, too overwhelming and uncomfortable. We may turn away from the problem in a variety of ways:

by blaming the victims of racism for not acting correctly
withdrawing from discussions of race because we feel “unsafe”
thinking that we just don’t have what it takes to deal with it all
feeling angry at people of color for bringing up race
minimizing the effects of racism
focusing on how much progress has been made
believing that we know all about racism already
feeling that what we really need is to come together and focus on the positive

4. Discomfort

We learn about institutional and cultural racism. We feel guilty and ashamed about the harms to people of color. We see that we are part of “the system.”

We may want to act, but aren’t sure yet about what to do or how to be an ally to people of color.

We may feel uncomfortable with our whiteness.

We may be overly eager to associate with people of color. We may seek their approval and worry about how we are being perceived.

We may feel alienated from, or impatient with, other white people who have not yet examined racism and whiteness the way we have.

5. Acceptance

We gain understanding of our race privilege and how it has and continues to benefit us. We understand that this is a life-long learning.

We search for new and more comfortable ways of being white. We look to other white anti-racists and get help in unlearning racism. We begin to see how we have internalized the values of white supremacy culture and the fact that racism is a white problem.

We realize we must cultivate our resilience, and accept the feelings of racial discomfort that come up if we are going to move forward and create change.

6. Wholeness

We develop a positive and constructive racial identity, one that incorporate a new white anti-racist identity, separating from the values of white supremacy culture.

We join with people of color and other white anti-racist allies to dismantle white power and privilege in institutions. We strive to be accountable to people of color in our efforts and to work with other white people.

We are able to feel positively about our own racial identity, while also acknowledging other aspects of our identity. We are comfortable in our own skin.

Discussions of race no longer seem threatening. We become willing to raise issues of interpersonal and institutional racism. We can ask hard questions, transcend dichotomies and open up new possibilities, moving conversations and actions about race forward.