

# Racism: Deconstructing It

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## The Bonner Community Engagement Curriculum

**BWBR Description:** *Bonner Curriculum workshop helps participants think about their understanding of race. It helps them look at racial discrimination and racism.*

**Overview:** At times on campus and in communities, dialogue concerning racism is impaired or hindered by a lack of thinking deeper about the nature and perpetuation of racism. This workshop focuses on leading participants through a series of exercises considering the background of American racism and its forms, including institutional. It guides, regardless of background, through understanding racism as a social construct that affects members of all races, where privileges are administered to some groups and disadvantages to others.

**Category:** Diversity; anti-racism skills; privilege; relationship building; reflection

**Level:** Intermediate

**Recommended  
Bonner Sequence:**

This training is recommended for Bonner students late during the first year or second year, or in conjunction with a specific focus on diversity awareness. If for a retreat, a longer version could be useful.



**first year (2nd  
semester) or  
second year**

**Learning Outcomes:**

- To engage participants in meaningful dialogue concerning racism

- To examine the roots of racism and establish a definition and deeper regard for its various forms
- To examine and deconstruct issues stemming from racism

### **Materials:**

- Flip chart paper for brainstorming throughout the workshop
- Markers
- Several stacks of post-it notes for participants

### **How to Prepare:**

As the facilitator, it will be your job to keep the discussion and dialogue focused. To do this, prepare by doing your own research on racism. If possible, go through the workshop prior to facilitating it and see how what you reveal about your own thinking and experiences. Also prepare all materials and have them ready for easy disbursement for exercises.

### **How to Do/Brief Outline:**

Following is a very loose outline. Adjust the time allotted to each part as you find most effective.

This one-hour workshop has the following parts:

1) The Guidelines	suggested time 5 minutes
2) Pair Warm Up	suggested time 10 minutes
3) Power & Prejudice	suggested time 15 minutes
4) Roots of Racism in the American context	suggested time 10 minutes
5) Exposing Racial Constructs	suggested time 10 minutes
6) Introducing White Privilege	suggested time 10 minutes

In a follow-up session, you may want to process some of what is covered, such as white privilege and stereotyping, in more depth.

### **Part 1) The Guidelines**

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Begin the workshop by introducing yourself (if new) and hopes for the session. Set a tone that is warm, relaxed, and also serious.

Then, set some Ground Rules for the session. Ask participants to offer some ground rules. Get a group consensus before writing them as official group guidelines. The final guidelines should have, at least, the following basic guidelines:

- Respect each view, opinion, and experience offered by any participant
- Use "I" statements/speak for yourself/no generalized comments
- What is disclosed in the workshop stays in the workshop
- Any one who feels it necessary may excuse themselves from the group for whatever reason

## **Part 2) Pair Warm Up**

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Break people into pairs and have them share on the following question:

***When was the first time you understood that you had a "race" or racial identity?  
How did you learn that?***

Encourage people to switch and make time for each person (5 minutes each).

## **Part 3) Power and Prejudice**

Suggested time: 15 minutes

Begin the workshop by introducing yourself and the topic. Without out any other explanation of the activity, divide the group into 2 groups. Giving each group flip chart paper and markers, tell one group to brainstorm definitions of **Power** and tell the other group to brainstorm definitions to **Prejudice**. Then explain that at the end of several minutes of brainstorming, they should work to form one group definition of the terms. Give the groups about 10 minutes to work.

After 10 minutes, reconvene the groups and have each present its findings, including their ideas in brainstorming and their final definition. Take their flip chart sheets and post them on a wall.

Now explain that both groups have developed two sides of the term that still plagues our society, racism.

Go on to define *Power*, *Prejudice*, and, thus, *Racism*:

**Prejudice** is defined as characterizations or stereotypes that once aimed to organize and simplify the abundance of information that exists in the world, but now has become insufficient and distorted. People, from these insufficient and distorted characterizations, make pre-judgments about other groups of people that are, in many instances, negative and biased.

**Power** is defined as the ability to influence others. Groups use their power to discriminate against other “lesser” groups in order to maintain their characteristics and privilege.

**Racism**, therefore, is the combination of racial prejudice and power (manifested through discrimination) that has traditionally functioned to systematically oppress and even exterminate groups of people based upon perceived racial inferiority.

### **Part 3) Roots of Racism in the American Context**

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Once everyone has agreed on the guidelines, move to a brainstorm about the historical presence of racism in America.

You can use a brainstorm like:

***What are the important facts, historical events, legal and political issues, court cases, etc., that you think it’s important that Americans (or all those living in America) know concerning racial and cultural discrimination?***

You can give a few examples to start. Sample ideas will be:

- Confiscating of land of Native Americans
- Slavery of Africans
- Segregation by race in schools and public places/institutions
- Japanese Internment during World War II

While this is a topic that can bring up lots of emotion and interpretations, there is in fact a historical record of unequal treatment under the law and political systems. Use the attached handout ***Historical Examples of Legal and Institutional Discrimination by Race in the United States*** after the brainstorm to summarize some of those key historical facts.

You may want to return to this during a later meeting.

## Part 4) Exposing and Discussing Racial Constructs

Suggested time: 10 minutes

After explaining the historical roots of racism, ask members of the group to help you define two words: **Black** and **White**.

You can break the group into two or go in turn. Ask members to explain what white is. Write their suggestions on flip chart paper. Do the same procedure for black.

Now compare the group's ideas for both terms. Ask the group to notice the words used to describe each term. Ask them how each term makes them feel.

Now introduce the standard dictionary definitions of both terms. You should have them pre-written on flip chart people for the entire group to examine.

### **Standard definitions:**

#### **White**

**1)** Free from color. **2)** Being a member of a group or race characterized by reduced pigmentation and usually specifically distinguished from persons belonging to groups marked by black, brown, yellow, or red skin **3)** Marked by upright fairness **4)** Free from spot or blemish **5)** Free from moral impurity: Innocent **6)** Marked by the wearing of white by the woman as a symbol of purity <a white wedding> **7)** Not intended to cause harm **8)** Favorable or fortunate **9)** Conservative or reactionary in political outlook and action.

#### **Black**

**1)** Very dark in color **2)** Having dark skin, hair, and relating to any of various population groups having dark pigmentation of the skin **3)** relating to the Afro-American people or their culture **4)** Dirty, soiled **5)** Characterized by the absence of light **6)** Thoroughly sinister or evil, wicked **7)** Indicative of condemnation or discredit **8)** Connected with or invoking the supernatural and especially the devil **10)** Very sad, gloomy, or calamitous **11)** Marked by the occurrence of disaster **12)** Characterized by hostility or angry discontent **13)** Characterized by grim, distorted, or grotesque satire.

Examining the definitions, ask the participants to:

- Explain the overall tone of each definition
- Explain how the definitions could lend themselves to an argument that one race was better than the other.

After examining the definitions, introduce the next exercise.

Divide the group into 2 smaller groups. Explain to one group that its task will be to brainstorm as many negative phrases that use *white* as possible. Tell the other group that its task will be to brainstorm as many positive phrases as possible that use *black*. Give the groups about 5 minutes to brainstorm.

After 5 minutes, have each group present its findings. Debrief with the following question:

- What did you learn from this discussion?

## **Part 5) Introducing White Privilege**

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Introduce this part by explaining that most of the workshop thus far has focused on racism as acts by one group against others to maintain its own characteristics and privilege.

*Moreover, we've also focused on racism between whites and blacks.*

*In order to further understand the depth of racism in our society that extends to all minority groups, let's focus not simply on racism, but the hidden systems of benefit and privilege that allows white (western) culture to maintain its dominance: let's look at what can be called White Privilege.*

Reiterate the guidelines and stress that these guidelines will be imperative for all participants to adhere to respect as you move into sensitive topics.

Give people the checklist and have them go through it (handout on next page and at end). Ask them to mark the privileges that they have. If you can then build in some time for sharing and discussion, do so.

Ask them to think about:

- If they've ever thought about these privileges or lack of privileges.
- How these privileges (or lack of) have made them feel.
- How these statements may relate to racism.

After, give them this definition.

### **What is white privilege?**

***The package of benefits granted to those members of society with white skin. Moreover, it's the privileges that white people have been granted, which allows them certain things in our society that are not readily, easily, or available at all to persons of color.***

#### **White Privilege Statements**

- I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
- I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
- I can go shopping alone most of the time, fairly well assured that I will not be followed or harassed by store detectives.
- I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely and positively represented.
- When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
- I could arrange to protect our young children most of the time from people who might not like them.
- I did not have to educate myself or my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.
- I can remain oblivious to the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

- I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
- I can easily find academic courses and institutions that give attention only to people of my race.

*(Adopted partially from Peggy Macintosh's, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.")*

After a few moments of reflection, pose the first of 2 questions to the group:

***Is it possible to give up white privilege?***

Most scholars of white privilege state that such privileges cannot be given up because they are awarded voluntarily by others in society. However, they argue that whites can work against the detrimental results of white privilege by calling attention to instances where one is being favored (in any situation) because of skin color.

As the facilitator, work to help participants understand that white privilege is something that society confers to white people (and those that look white), regardless of their beliefs and opinions and that whites can work to understand how they are privileged so they can further work to spread such privilege to minority groups.

After discussion of the first question, pose the last:

***Do you believe privilege can be shared or spread to other groups?***

Here, you may want to get into discussion about privilege, and some may bring up the idea of being an ally.

**Part 7) Closing**

Suggested time: 5 minutes

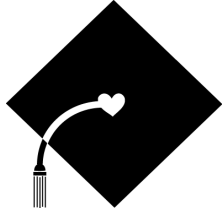
To wrap, give students some questions to think about over the next few weeks and return to this then, connecting it with their service and civic engagement experiences:

- What learning or reflections have you had about race and racism?
- How can you apply these reflections and learning to your work in the program and in the community?



- What other kinds of things do you want to learn or experience as you think about privilege?

Finally have participants present their answers and adjourn.



# Historical Examples of Legal and Institutional Discrimination by "Race" in the United States

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Since the establishment of the United States, there have been ongoing forms of legal and political discrimination against Native Americans/American Indians (who technically are not considered a racial group). A few to note are: *The Indian Removal Act (1830)* which forced a mass relocation of Indian nations to west of the Mississippi, the most infamous one being the "Trail of Tears" which left half of the Cherokee nation dead. *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia (1831)*. This Supreme Court ruling held that tribes are not foreign nations, but dependencies, and need not be treated equally.

*The Major Crimes Act (1885)* extended U.S. law enforcement jurisdiction into Indian territories, effectively breaking all treaties that guaranteed they could have responsibility for law enforcement themselves. *The General Allotment (or Dawes) Act (1887)* used a "blood quantum" test to take away over 100 million acres of land from "mixed blood" Indians. Indians were not granted full citizenship until *The Indian Citizenship Act (1924)* which conferred U.S. citizenship on all Indians who wanted it but renounce their claims to tribal identity (and land).

Persons of African descent were enslaved and systematically treated as inferior to Whites in the United States until 1865. The XIII Amendment then granted, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

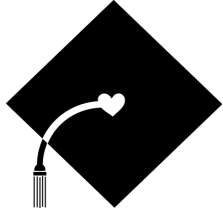
Non-whites, including African Americans, Native American Indians, Asians, and others, were treated as lessor or unequal citizens under the law until 1868. The XIV Amendment then passed to state, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State

deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

Non-whites were denied the right to vote until 1870. That year, the XV Amendment was passed stating, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." In practice, this gave Black men the right to vote, but Black women did not receive the right to vote until 1920, when all women won that right with the passage of the XIX Amendment.

Japanese Americans were interned in camps between 1942 and 1946 on the grounds that they posed danger to national security. This internment was legally supported by the passage Executive Order 9066 by President Roosevelt, authorizing the secretary of war to define military areas "from which any or all persons may be excluded as deemed necessary or desirable."

The Hispanic population, growing in the U.S. since the beginning of the 20th century, has faced discrimination in the forms of unequal wages, prohibited or lesser access to poverty relief programs, limited access to American schools, and at times refusal of health care by hospitals.



# White Privilege

Adapted from Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*.

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### Definition:

*White Privilege is: the package of benefits granted to those members of society with white skin. Moreover, it's the privileges that white people have been granted, which allows them certain things in our society that are not readily, easily, or available at all to persons of color.*

#### Examples of White Privilege: Statements to Consider

- I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
- I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
- I can go shopping alone most of the time, fairly well assured that I will not be followed or harassed by store detectives.
- I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely and positively represented.
- When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
- I could arrange to protect our young children most of the time from people who might not like them.
- I did not have to educate myself or my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.

- I can remain oblivious to the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
- I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
- I can easily find academic courses and institutions that give attention only to people of my race.

*Adopted partially from Peggy McIntosh's, White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.*

For more information see:

<http://www.amptoons.com/blog/files/mcintosh.html>

For a longer version see:

<http://www.deanza.edu/faculty/lewisjulie/White%20Priviledge%20Unpacking%20the%20Invisible%20Knapsack.pdf>

Also see Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies" (1988).