

# Definitions of General Concepts I: Racism

***Race:*** A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, which serve social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given time. Racial categories subsume ethnic groups.

***Ethnicity:*** A social construct which divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as shared sense group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history and ancestral geographical base and can be self-selected and imposed or both at the same time. Examples of different ethnic groups are Cape Verdean, Haitian, African American (Black); Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese(Asian); Cherokee, Mohawk, Navajo (Native American); Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican (Latino/Hispanic/Chicano); Polish, Irish, and French, Italian, and other European (White).

***Racial and Ethnic Identity:*** An individual's awareness and experience of being a member of a racial and ethnic group; the racial and ethnic categories that an individual chooses to describe himself or herself; which might also be based on such factors as biological heritage, physical appearance, cultural affiliation, early socialization, and personal experience which might include a religious affiliation.

***Prejudice:*** Biased and predetermined opinions or feelings of hatred, resentment, or superiority towards people different from oneself. This may be expressed by members of any group: white vis a vis blacks and vice versa, asian vis a vis blacks and vice versa, etc.

***Stereotype:*** A generalization about a group of people usually based upon limited ideas and experiences that are attributed to the entire group. (Examples of stereotypes are: All black people have rhythm. White men can't jump. Whites people are more courteous than black people. Asians are smart in math and science. Latinos are very hot tempered.)

***Discrimination:*** The differential allocation of goods, resources, and services, and the limitation of access to full participation in society based on an individual's perceived membership in a particular social group.

***Power:*** The ability to create and support institutions and institutional language through which people in a system experience that system.

***Racism:*** The systematic subordination of members of targeted racial groups who have relatively little social power (in the United States Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asians), by members of the agent racial group (whites) who have relatively more social power. This subordination is supported by the actions of individuals, cultural norms, and values, and the institutional structures and practices of society.

***Institutional Racism.*** The network of institutional structures, policies, and practices that create advantages and benefits for Whites, and discrimination, oppression, and disadvantage for people from targeted groups. The advantages created for Whites are often invisible to them, or are considered "rights" available to everyone as opposed to "privileges" awarded to only some individual groups

***Individual Racism:*** The beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism. Individual racism can occur at both an unconscious and conscious level, and can be both active and passive. Examples include telling a racist joke, using a racial epithet, or believing in the inherent superiority of Whites.

***Active Racism:*** Actions which have as their stated or explicit goal the maintenance of the system of racism and the oppression of those in the targeted racial groups. People who participate in active racism, advocate the continued subjugation of members of the targeted groups and protection of "the rights" of members of agent group. These goals are often supported by a belief in the inferiority of People of Color and the superiority of white people, their culture, and their values.

***Passive Racism:*** Beliefs, attitudes, and actions that contribute to the maintenance of racism, without openly advocating violence or oppression. The conscious and unconscious maintenance of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that support the system of racism, racial prejudice, and racial dominance.

***White Privilege:*** The concrete benefits of access to resources and social rewards and the power to shape the norms and values of society, institution or community which Whites receive, unconsciously or consciously, by virtue of their skin color in a racist society. Examples include the ability to be unaware of race, the ability to live and work among people of the same racial group as their own, the security of not being pulled over by the police for being a suspicious person, the expectation that they speak for themselves and not for their entire race, the ability to have a job hire or promotion attributed to their skills and not affirmative action.<sup>3</sup>

***Horizontal Discrimination:*** The result of targeted racial groups believing, acting on, or enforcing the system of racial discrimination and oppression. Horizontal discrimination can occur between members of the same racial group (an Asian person telling another Asian wearing a sarong "dress like an American"; a Latino telling another Latino to stop speaking Spanish. It is sometimes called internalized racism.

***Ally:*** A white person who actively works to eliminate racism. This person may be motivated by self-interest in ending racism, a sense of moral obligation, or a commitment to foster social justice. It must not be patronizing and motivated by an agenda of "wanting to help those poor People of Color." A white ally may engage in antiracism work with other Whites and/or People of Color.

***Pseudo Ally.*** A white person who is familiar with the issues around race and always maintains a political position that supports antiracism, but fails to implement it in his/her personal actions, or the institutions where he/she works, studies, or plays.

***Empowered Person of Color:*** An empowered Person of Color has an understanding of racism and its impact on one's life without responding to the events and circumstances as a victim. Rather, being empowered means the capacity to engage individuals and institutions with an expectation of being treated well.