

# UNDERSTANDING WHITE PRIVILEGE AND LEARNING TO TALK ABOUT RACE

Privilege operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of target groups. In the United States, privilege is granted to people who have membership in one or more of these social identity groups:

- White people;
- Able-bodied people;
- Heterosexuals;
- Males;
- Christians;
- Middle or owning class people;
- Middle-aged people;
- English-speaking people

Privilege is characteristically invisible to people who have it. People in dominant groups often believe that they have earned the privileges that they enjoy or that everyone could have access to these privileges if only they worked to earn them. In fact, privileges are unearned and they are granted to people in the dominant groups whether they want those privileges or not, and regardless of their stated intent.

Unlike oppressed groups, people in dominant groups are frequently unaware that they are members of the dominant group due to the privilege of being able to see themselves as persons rather than stereotypes.<sup>1</sup>

White privilege should be viewed as a built-in advantage, separate from one's level of income or effort. It can be viewed as the:<sup>2</sup>

- Power of Normal
- Power of the Benefit of the Doubt
- Power of Accumulated Power

## STRATEGIES<sup>3</sup>

- Don't take it personally or use discomfort as an excuse to disengage.
- Learn to listen, when to amplify and when to speak up.
- Educate yourself.
- Educate fellow white people.
- Risk your unearned benefits to benefit others.

## READING LIST / RESOURCES

- White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, by Peggy McIntosh (white paper)
- White Fragility, by Robyn DiAngelo
- Between the World and Me, by Ta-nehisi Coates
- The Hate U Give, by Angie Thomas (novel)
- Seeing White, Scene on Radio (podcast)
- Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class White Anti-Racism, by Shannon Sullivan
- Waking up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race, by Debby Irving
- A White Teacher Talks About Race, by Julie Landsmen
- Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race, by Beverly Daniel Tatum
- Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America, by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva
- WhitePrivilegeConference.com
- The Unequal Opportunity Race (Video) [https://youtu.be/vX\\_Vzl-r8NY](https://youtu.be/vX_Vzl-r8NY)

*When people are woke enough to know the language to discuss race, gender, class + oppression generally, but not quite woke enough to give anything up—space, power, platform, reputation, position—this is arguably the most destructive pattern of behavior of our time.*

–Dhakshy Sooriyakumaran

1 Definition Source: Vanderbilt University Office of Active Citizenship and Service (<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs/wp-content/uploads/sites/140/Understanding-Privilege-and-Oppression-Handout.doc>) Definitions were abridged from: Leaven 2003 Doing Our Own Work: A Seminar for Anti-Racist White Women; Visions, Inc. and the MSU Extension Multicultural Awareness Workshop

2 <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/what-is-white-privilege-really>

3 <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/toolkit-for-what-is-white-privilege-really>