

## Core Concepts for Racial Justice Work Interaction Institute for Social Change

### Working Definitions

**Ally:** Someone from a dominant group (someone who experiences unearned privilege and/or power) who works with and/or acts in support of non-dominant group members, or someone who is united with another for a common cause. Allies take action, reflect on their own thinking and beliefs, seek out learning opportunities, and take initiative in interpersonal relations. (IISC)

Someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.) and work in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice. Allies understand that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways.

Allies commit to reducing their own complicity or collusion in oppression of those groups and invest in strengthening their own knowledge and awareness of oppression.

**Assimilation:** “The process in which one group takes on the cultural and other traits of a larger group.” In the United States, the “melting pot” was popular metaphor used to describe the expectation that 18th and 19th century European immigrant groups would assimilate into “American” culture rather than maintain an ethnic distinct identity.

**Bigotry:** Intolerant prejudice that glorifies one’s own group and denigrates members of other groups.

**Class:** Relative social status based on income, wealth, race, power, position, occupation and education.

**Collusion:** When people act to perpetuate oppression or prevent others from working to eliminate oppression. *Example: Able-bodied people who object to strategies for making buildings accessible because of the expense.*

**Colonialism:** Colonization can be defined as some form of invasion, dispossession and subjugation of a people. The invasion need not be military; it can begin—or continue—as geographical intrusion in the form of agricultural, urban or industrial encroachments. The result of such incursion is the dispossession of vast amounts of lands from the original inhabitants. This is often legalized after the fact. The long-term result of such massive dispossession is institutionalized inequality. The colonizer/colonized relationship is by nature an unequal one that benefits the colonizer at the expense of the colonized.

**Critical Race Theory:** The Critical Race Theory...movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies take up, but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, and even feelings and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces incrementalism and step by step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism and principles of constitutional law.

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**Culture:** The values, beliefs, arts, customs, and language that a group of people have discovered, invented, developed or inherited to address internal and external needs, and that comprise a way of life that can be taught, learned, reproduced, transformed, and passed on.

A social system of meaning and custom that is developed by a group of people to assure its adaptation and survival. These groups are distinguished by a set of unspoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviors and styles of communication.

**Cultural Appropriation:** Theft of cultural elements for one's own use, commodification, or profit — including symbols, art, language, customs, etc. — often without understanding, acknowledgement, or respect for its value in the original culture. Results from the assumption of a dominant (i.e. white) culture's right to take other cultural elements.

**Cultural Competence:** a set of congruent behaviors, knowledge, will and skills that enable just and effective work in multicultural settings. Cultural competency is never fully achieved, but is an ongoing process. Cultural competency can be developed by individuals, organizations, communities, etc.

Individuals develop their cultural competency by building knowledge, values, skills, and will that help them to:

- develop self-awareness and an understanding of one's own culture(s);
- understand and appreciate other cultures;
- facilitate understanding among people of different cultures;
- confront inconsistencies, biases and unconscious assumptions of cultures; and,
- take action to ensure fairness and access and correct for the results of historic inequities.

Organizations develop their cultural competency by building the knowledge, values, skills, and will of individuals; and building equitable, accessible and inclusive organizational culture, expectations, policies, structures, systems and processes. (adapted from Garth Ham, Alliance for Nonprofit Management)

**Cultural Racism:** Cultural racism refers to representations, messages and stories conveying the idea that behaviors and values associated with white people or “whiteness” are automatically “better” or more “normal” than those associated with other racially defined groups. Cultural racism shows up in advertising, movies, history books, definitions of patriotism, and in policies and laws. Cultural racism is also a powerful force in maintaining systems of internalized supremacy and internalized racism. It does that by influencing collective beliefs about what constitutes appropriate behavior, what is seen as beautiful, and the value placed on various forms of expression. All of these cultural norms and values in the U.S. have explicitly or implicitly racialized ideals and assumptions (for example, what “nude” means as a color, which facial features and body types are considered beautiful, which child-rearing practices are considered appropriate.)

**Diaspora:** “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions...a common element in all forms of diaspora; these are people who live outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories and recognize that their traditional homelands are reflected deeply in the languages they speak, religions they adopt, and the cultures they produce.

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**Discrimination:** The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion and other categories. (*Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative. A Community Builder's Tool Kit.*)

In the United States the law makes it illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex. The law also makes it illegal to retaliate against a person because the person complained about discrimination, filed a charge of discrimination, or participated in an employment discrimination investigation or lawsuit. The law also requires that employers reasonably accommodate applicants' and employees' sincerely held religious practices, unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the operation of the employer's business.

**Diversity:** Each individual is unique, and groups of individuals reflect multiple dimensions of difference including: race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, cognitive styles, and much more. Valuing diversity means embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of difference that exist in groups. (Adapted from Diversity Initiatives Campaign, The Diversity Project)

Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity, and gender — the groups that most often come to mind when the term “diversity” is used — but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values.

**Equity:** “The state that would be achieved if how one fares in society was no longer predictable by race, gender, class, language or any other social/cultural factor. Educational equity means that each child receives what he or she needs to develop to his or her full academic and social potential.” (National Equity Project)

**Ethnicity:** A social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history and ancestral geographical base. *Examples of different ethnic groups are: Cape Verdean, Haitian, African American (Black); Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese (Asian); Cherokee, Mohawk, Navaho (Native American); Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican (Latino); Polish, Irish, and Swedish (White).*

**Implicit Bias:** Also known as unconscious or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness. Many studies have indicated that implicit biases affect individuals' attitudes and actions, thus creating real-world implications, even though individuals may not even be aware that those biases exist within themselves. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to trump individuals' stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is often used to measure implicit biases with regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other topics.

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**Inclusion:** a value and practice of ensuring that people feel they belong and that their input is valued by the whole (group, organization, society, system, etc.), particularly regarding decisions that affect their lives. (Adapted from Equity and Inclusion Campaign)

Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.

**Intersectionality:** An approach largely advanced by women of color, arguing that classifications such as gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they interact and intersect in individuals' lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive.

Exposing [one's] multiple identities can help clarify the ways in which a person can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. For example, a Black woman in America does not experience gender inequalities in exactly the same way as a white woman, nor racial oppression identical to that experienced by a Black man. Each race and gender intersection produces a qualitatively distinct life.

**Liberation:** The act of struggling against systems of oppression with the ultimate goal of self-determination. The right to opportunity, thought, expression, and action. (Mia Henry at the Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership)

**Movement Building:** is the effort of social change agents to engage power holders and the broader society in addressing a systemic problem or injustice while promoting an alternative vision or solution. Movement building requires a range of intersecting approaches through a set of distinct stages over a long-term period of time. Through movement building, organizers can:

- Propose solutions to the root causes of social problems;
- Enable people to exercise their collective power;
- Humanize groups that have been denied basic human rights and improve conditions for the groups affected;
- Create structural change by building something larger than a particular organization or campaign; and
- Promote visions and values for society based on fairness, justice and democracy

**Oppression:** Systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; when some people are denied something of value, while others have ready access.

**Internalized Oppression:** “A system of disadvantage [that includes people who are the targets of oppression internalizing]... a set of developed ideas, beliefs, actions and behaviors that support or collude with [oppression and in which]... individuals, institutions and communities ... are often unconsciously and habitually rewarded for supporting ... privilege and power and punished and excluded when [they] do not.”

**Power:** is the capacity of individuals or groups to bring about change by:

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- influencing people – “I/we can persuade others (individuals or groups) to do or refrain from doing something.”
- affecting one’s environment – “I /we can manipulate, change or control our environment.”
- addressing personal or group needs – “I/we can ensure that our needs are met.”
- pursuing desires – “I/we can take steps to get what we want.”
- protecting interests – “I/we can make sure that we and what’s important to us are protected.”
- defining issues, set agendas, and expand or limit the scope of discussion – “I/we can determine what is discussed, how issues are framed, and what is on/off the table for discussion.”
- determining who can participate in decision making and how – “I/we can decide who will make decisions and whose input will be considered.”

Power is multi-dimensional and can be exercised by individuals, groups, organizations and systems. Power is not a fixed asset that people possess. Rather, it is socially constructed, understood, and legitimized through social relationships among individuals and groups of people.

Neither inherently negative nor positive, power can be developed and exercised either as “power over” or as “power with” others. It can be generated, redistributed, or shared. Power can be exercised in ways that affirm human dignity, protect individuals and groups from oppression, and support a just and sustainable distribution of resources. Alternatively, power can be exercised in ways that undermine human dignity, oppress or disenfranchise individuals and groups, and maintain unfair, unsustainable distributions of resources.

People and groups gain power through many sources, including:

- being in a legally or institutionally protected group or having legally defined rights;
- having a position or role that gives one authority or responsibility to do certain things;
- having expertise or technical knowledge;
- being able to influence people by having gained their respect or admiration;
- having the capacity (real or perceived) to coerce, punish or employ physical force or to decide who will be punished or hurt;
- having the capacity (real or perceived) to decide who is rewarded and how;
- having control over resources needed to meet one’s own/one’s communities’ needs or satisfy desires;
- have “moral authority” (need to describe this) or,
- having the ability to decide how and for whose benefit public resources are used.

Power is unequally distributed globally and in U.S. society; some individuals or groups wield greater power than others, thereby allowing them greater access and control over resources. Wealth, whiteness, citizenship, patriarchy, heterosexism, and education are a few key social mechanisms through which power operates. Although power is often conceptualized as power over other individuals or groups, other variations are power with (used in the context of building collective strength) and power within (which references an individual’s internal strength). Learning to “see” and understand relations of power is vital to organizing for progressive social change.

**Prejudice:** A pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or groups toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on

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unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics.

**Privilege:** Unearned social power accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to ALL members of a dominant group (e.g. white privilege, male privilege, etc.). Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we're taught not to see it, but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage over those who do not have it.

**Race:** A socially constructed way of grouping people, based on skin color and other apparent physical differences, which has no genetic or scientific basis. The concept of race was created and used to justify social and economic oppression of blacks and other people of color by whites. (Adapted from "Race: The Power of an Illusion") A political construction created to concentrate power with white people and legitimize dominance over non-white people.

**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 him or herself based on such factors as biological heritage, physical appearance, cultural affiliation, early socialization, and personal experience.

"The U.S. Census Bureau must adhere to the 1997 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) standards on race and ethnicity which guide the Census Bureau in classifying written responses to the race question:

**White** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

**Black or African American** – A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

**American Indian or Alaska Native** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.

**Asian** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.

**Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

**Hispanic or Latino** – OMB requires federal agencies to use a minimum of two ethnicities in collecting and reporting data: Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. OMB defines "Hispanic or Latino" as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. Hispanic origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before arriving in the United States. People who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be any race."

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**Racial Equity:** Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.

**Racial justice:** the creation and proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment and outcomes for all people, regardless of race. (Applied Research Center)

**Racial Identity Development Theory:** Racial Identity Development Theory discusses how people in various racial groups and with multiracial identities form their particular self- concept. It also describes some typical phases in remaking that identity based on learning and awareness of systems of privilege and structural racism, cultural and historical meanings attached to racial categories, and factors operating in the larger socio-historical level (e.g. globalization, technology, immigration, and increasing multiracial population).

**Racial Healing:** To restore to health or soundness; to repair or set right; to restore to spiritual Wholeness.

**Racial Reconciliation:** Reconciliation involves three ideas. First, it recognizes that racism in America is both systemic and institutionalized, with far-reaching effects on both political engagement and economic opportunities for minorities. Second, reconciliation is engendered by empowering local communities through relationship- building and truth-telling. Lastly, justice is the essential component of the conciliatory process—justice that is best termed as restorative rather than retributive, while still maintaining its vital punitive character.

**Racism:** A form of oppression based on the socially constructed concept of race\* exercised by the dominant racial group (whites) over non-dominant racial groups. We are using the term “racism” specifically to refer to individual, cultural, institutional and systemic ways by which differential consequences are created for groups historically or currently defined as white being advantaged, and groups historically or currently defined as non-white (African, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, etc.) as disadvantaged. That idea aligns with those who define racism as prejudice plus power, a common phrase in the field. Combining the concepts of prejudice and power points out the mechanisms by which racism leads to different consequences for different groups. The relationship and behavior of these interdependent elements has allowed racism to recreate itself generation after generation, such that systems that perpetuate racial inequity no longer need racist actors or to explicitly promote racial differences in opportunities, outcomes and consequences to maintain those differences.

### **Racism operates on four levels: (Source: Applied Research Center)**

1. **Individual/Internalized Racism** is the set of private beliefs, prejudices, attitudes, and actions that individuals have about the superiority of whites and the inferiority of people of color that support or perpetuate racism. Individual racism can be deliberate, or the individual may act to perpetuate or support racism without knowing that is what he or she is doing. Among whites,

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it manifests as internalized racial superiority. Among people of color, it manifests as internalized racism or internalized racial oppression.

Examples:

- Believing (consciously or unconsciously) in the inherent superiority of whites over other groups;
  - Avoiding people of color whom you do not know personally, but not whites whom you do not know personally (e.g., white people crossing the street to avoid a group of Latino/a young people; locking their doors when they see African American families sitting on their doorsteps in a city neighborhood; or not hiring a person of color because “something doesn’t feel right”);
  - Accepting things as they are (a form of collusion).
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- **Internalized Racism/Internalized Racial Oppression:** Internalized racism is the situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group’s power. It involves four essential and interconnected elements:
    - *Decision-making* - Due to racism, people of color do not have the ultimate decision-making power over the decisions that control our lives and resources. As a result, on a personal level, we may think white people know more about what needs to be done for us than we do. On an interpersonal level, we may not support each other’s authority and power - especially if it is in opposition to the dominating racial group. Structurally, there is a system in place that rewards people of color who support white supremacy and power and coerces or punishes those who do not.
    - *Resources* - Resources, broadly defined (e.g. money, time, etc.), are unequally in the hands and under the control of white people. Internalized racism is the system in place that makes it difficult for people of color to get access to resources for our own communities and to control the resources of our community. We learn to believe that serving and using resources for ourselves and our particular community is not serving “everybody.”
    - *Standards* - With internalized racism, the standards for what is appropriate or “normal” that people of color accept are white people’s or Eurocentric standards. We have difficulty naming, communicating and living up to our deepest standards and values, and holding ourselves and each other accountable to them.
    - *Naming the problem* - There is a system in place that misnames the problem of racism as a problem of or caused by people of color and blames the disease - emotional, economic, political, etc. - on people of color. With internalized racism, people of color might, for example, believe we are more violent than white people and not consider state-sanctioned political violence or the hidden or privatized violence of white people and the systems they put in place and support.

2. **Interpersonal Racism** is the expression of racism between individuals. Once we bring our private beliefs into our interaction with others, racism is now in the interpersonal realm.



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Examples: public expressions of racial prejudice, hate, bias and bigotry between individuals, such as telling a racist joke or using a racial epithet.

3. **Institutional Racism** is discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and practices, inequitable opportunities and impacts within organizations and institutions, based on race. Institutional racism refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.

Examples:

- Government policies that explicitly restricted the ability of people to get loans to buy or improve their homes in neighborhoods with high concentrations of African Americans (also known as “red-lining”).
  - City sanitation department policies that concentrate trash transfer stations and other environmental hazards disproportionately in communities of color.
4. **Structural Racism** is the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color; in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequality. Structural racism encompasses the entire system of white domination, diffused and infused in all aspects of society including its history, culture, politics, economics and entire social fabric. Structural racism is more difficult to locate in a particular institution because it involves the reinforcing effects of multiple institutions and cultural norms, past and present, continually reproducing old and producing new forms of racism. Structural racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism – all other forms of racism emerge from structural racism.

*For example, we can see structural racism in the many institutional, cultural and structural factors that contribute to lower life expectancy for African American and Native American men, compared to white men. These include higher exposure to environmental toxins, dangerous jobs and unhealthy housing stock, higher exposure to and more lethal consequences for reacting to violence, stress and racism, lower rates of health care coverage, access and quality of care and systematic refusal by the nation to fix these things.*

**Reparations:** States have a legal duty to acknowledge and address widespread or systematic human rights violations, in cases where the state caused the violations or did not seriously try to prevent them. Reparations initiatives seek to address the harms caused by these violations. They can take the form of compensating for the losses suffered, which helps overcome some of the consequences of abuse. They can also be future oriented—providing rehabilitation and a better life to victims—and help to change the underlying causes of abuse. Reparations publicly affirm that victims are rights-holders entitled to redress.

**Social Justice.** A socially just world meets everyone’s basic needs (food, housing, health care, education, job, social security) in a dignified way; treats people from every background with dignity

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and respect; supports the development of all people to their full potential; guarantees equitable distribution of resources; makes sure all people are physically and psychologically safe and secure; and ensures everyone has a voice in the decisions that affect them. (ACT for Social Justice, adapted from Class Action)

**Stereotype:** A standardized mental picture that is held in common about members of a group that represents an oversimplified opinion, attitude, or unexamined judgment, without regard to individual difference.

**Structural Racialization:** Structural racialization connotes the dynamic process that creates cumulative and durable inequalities based on race. Interactions between individuals are shaped by and reflect underlying and often hidden structures that shape biases and create disparate outcomes even in the absence of racist actors or racist intentions. The presence of structural racialization is evidenced by consistent differences in outcomes in education attainment, family wealth and even life span.

**Unearned Privilege:** Systematic advantage that is granted based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or other dimensions of diversity, regardless of individuals' personal characteristics or efforts. This creates dominant/"up" and non-dominant/"down" groups in a society. These advantages are real and exist whether or not a person from a privileged group makes a conscious, deliberate choice to seek or act on the privileges or whether the person is even aware that s/he benefits from such systematic, structural advantages.

**White Privilege:** Refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it.

**Cultural White Privilege:** A set of dominant cultural assumptions about what is good, normal or appropriate that reflects Western European white world views and dismisses or demonizes other world views.

**Institutional White Privilege:** Policies, practices and behaviors of institutions -- such as schools, banks, non-profits or the Supreme Court -- that have the effect of maintaining or increasing accumulated advantages for those groups currently defined as white, and maintaining or increasing disadvantages for those racial or ethnic groups not defined as white. The ability of institutions to survive and thrive even when their policies, practices and behaviors maintain, expand or fail to redress accumulated disadvantages and/or inequitable outcomes for people of color.

**White Supremacy:** White supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent; for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.