

Definitions and Descriptions of Racism

- **WHITE SUPREMACY:** White supremacy is an 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.
- **WHITE** (as in •white people”): The term white, referring to people, was created by Virginia slave owners and colonial rulers in the 17th century. It replaced terms like Christian and “Englishman” (sic) to distinguish European colonists from Africans and indigenous peoples. European colonial powers established white as a legal concept after Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 during which indentured servants of European and African descent had united against the colonial elite. The legal distinction of white separated the servant class on the basis of skin color and continental origin. “The creation of ‘white’ meant giving privileges to some, while denying them to others with the justification of biological and social inferiority. (Margo Adair & Sharon Powell, *The Subjective Side of Politics*. SF: 1988. p.17.)
- **WHITE PRIVILEGE:** A privilege is a right, favor, advantage, immunity, specially granted to one individual or group, and *withheld from another*. (Websters. Italics mine.)

White privilege is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of: (1) Preferential prejudice for and treatment of white people based solely on their skin color and/or ancestral origin from Europe; and (2) Exemption from racial and/or national oppression based on skin color and/or ancestral origin from Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Arab world.

U.S. institutions and culture (economic, legal, military, political, educational, entertainment, familial and religious) privilege peoples from Europe over peoples from the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Arab world. In a white supremacy system, white privilege and racial oppression are two sides of the same coin. “White peoples were exempt from slavery, land grab and genocide, the first forms of white privilege (in the future US).” (Virginia Harris and Trinity Ordoña, “Developing Unity among Women of Color: Crossing the Barriers of Internalized Racism and Cross Racial Hostility,” in *Making Face, Making Soul: Hacienda Caras*. Edited by Gloria Anzaldúa. SF: Aunt Lute Press, 1990. p. 310).

- **RACE:** A specious classification of human beings created by Europeans (whites) which assigns human worth and social status using ‘white’ as the model of humanity and the height of human achievement for the purpose of establishing and maintaining privilege and power. (Ronald Chisom and Michael Washington, *Undoing Racism: A Philosophy of International Social Change*. People’s Institute Press. People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond. 1444 North Johnson Street. New Orleans, Louisiana, 70116. 1997. Second Edition. p. 30—31.)
- **PREJUDICE:** A prejudice is a *pre-judgment* in favor of or against a person, a group, an event, an idea, or a thing. An action based on prejudgment is *discrimination*. A negative prejudgment is often called a *stereotype*. An action based on a stereotype is called *bigotry*. (What distinguishes this group of terms from all the others on these two pages is that there is no power relationship necessarily implied or expressed by “prejudice,” “discrimination,” “stereotype” or “bigotry.”)
- **POWER:** (“Power” is a relational term. It can only be understood as a relationship between human beings in a specific historical, economic and social setting. It must be exercised to be visible.)

1. Power is control of, or access to, those institutions sanctioned by the state. (Definition by Barbara Major of People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, New Orleans)
 2. Power is the ability to define reality and to convince other people that it is their definition. (Definition by Dr. Wade Nobles)
 3. Power is ownership and control of the major resources of a state; and the capacity to make and enforce decisions based on this ownership and control; and (Alternative definition to #1)
 4. Power is the capacity of a group of people to decide what they want and to act in an *organized* way to get it.
 5. (In terms of an individual), power is the *capacity* to act.
- **RACISM:** Racism is race prejudice plus power. (Definition, by People's Institute. I use "white supremacy" as a synonym for racism.)
 - **INTERNALIZED RACISM:** (1) The poison of racism seeping into the psyches of people of color, until people of color believe about themselves what whites believe about them -- that they are inferior to whites; (2) The behavior of one person of color toward another that stems from this psychic poisoning. Often called "inter-racial hostility;" and (3) The acceptance by persons of color of Eurocentric values. (See Harris and Ordoira, op. cit. pp. 304—3 16.)
 - **REVERSE RACISM:** A term created and used by white people to deny their white privilege. Those in denial use the term reverse racism to refer to hostile behavior by people of color toward whites, and to affirmative action policies, which allegedly give 'preferential treatment' to people of color over whites. In the U.S., there is no such thing as "reverse racism."
 - **A RACIST:** A racist is one who is both privileged and socialized on the basis of race by a white supremacist (racist) system. The term applies to all white people (i.e., people of European descent) living in the United States, regardless of class, gender, religion, culture or sexuality. By this definition, people of color cannot be racists, because as peoples within the U.S. system, they do not have the power to back up their prejudices, hostilities or acts of discrimination. (This does not deny the existence of such prejudices, hostilities, acts of rage or discrimination.)
 - **A NON—RACIST:** A non-term. The term was created by whites to deny responsibility for systemic racism, to maintain an aura of innocence in the face of racial oppression, and to shift responsibility for that oppression from whites to people of color (called "blaming the victim"). Responsibility for perpetuating and legitimizing a racist system rests both on those who actively maintain it, and on those who refuse to challenge it. Silence is consent.
 - **AN ANTI—RACIST:** (As applied to white people), an anti-racist is a person who makes a conscious choice to act to challenge some aspect of the white supremacy system: including her/his own white privilege, as well as some form of oppression against people of color. (As applied to people of color), some use the term anti-racist. Others use synonyms such as freedom fighter, activist, warrior, liberation fighter, political prisoner, prisoner of war, sister, brother, etc. In practice, it is difficult for an activist of color not to be an anti-racist activist, since the struggle against racial oppression intersects with every issue affecting people of color.
 - **OPPRESSOR, OPPRESSED, OPPRESSION:** An oppressor is one who uses her/his power to dominate another, or who refuses to use her/his power to challenge that domination. An oppressed is one who is dominated by an oppressor, and by those who consent with their silence. Oppression is the power and the effects of domination. In the U.S., there are many forms of (often) interlocking oppressions: racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, anti-

semitism, ablism, ageism, etc.

In a white supremacist, capitalist, male supremacist, and heterosexist system, all non-ruling class whites are in some way oppressed by that system, but we are also privileged by it. When we organize against *our own oppression*, but not against our privilege -- that is, against the oppression of people of color, we become oppressors of people of color. Inaction is complicity. Silence is consent. To cease being oppressors, we must *act against oppression*. (See “The Strategy of the Slave Owners.”)

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A Working Definition of Racism

If you take apart the term racism, you get an “ism” — an oppression — based on race. The People’s Institute uses this working definition:

Racism equals race prejudice plus power.

We’ve already defined prejudice. Let’s examine race and power.

Race

The Human Race: Born and Bred in Africa

Have you ever heard a well—meaning white person say, “I’m not a member of any race except the human race?” What she usually means by this statement is that she doesn’t want to perpetuate racial categories by acknowledging that she is white. This is an evasion of responsibility for her participation in a system based on supremacy for white people.

But anthropologically speaking, her point is well taken. Taking the term “race” to mean “species,” there is only one species of human. All of us belong to the human race. And the human race was born, raised and bred in Africa. Africa is the motherland of human civilization: religion, philosophy, art, language, architecture, science, medicine, agriculture and urban planning.

People indigenous to Africa and the Americas have always celebrated the diversity of the human species. You can see that celebration in paintings of peoples on the tomb of Ramses III (1200 BC) of Kemet (Egypt) and the four directions of the world celebrated by Native Americans. What makes these representations so different from those introduced by Europeans is that the former bear no witness to any hierarchy of value of humans based on ethnicity or skin color.

Europeans: Seeing the Human Race through ‘Race—colored’ glasses

Beginning in the fifteenth century, Europeans began to see the world through race—colored glasses. At first, their priests and Popes justified the new worldview as God’s law revealed to Christians. By the 18th century their scientists used their racial lenses to construct racial categories

for human beings, with distinct hierarchies based on religion, ethnicity and skin color. European slave—owners in the colonies created a whole legal system based on race. And by the 19th century, politicians asserted that ‘race’ was the reason Europeans and European—Americans deserved to run the world.

To understand why and how this happened, we need to examine elements of the history of Europe and the United States. But first, let’s start with a working definition of race, created by The People’s Institute:

Race is “a specious classification of human beings created by Europeans (whites) which assigns human worth and social status using “white” as the model of humanity and the height of human achievement for the purpose of establishing and maintaining privilege and power.” (Ronald Chisom and Michael Washington, *Undoing Racism: A Philosophy of International Social Change*. People’s Institute Press: The People’s Institute, 1444 North Johnson St., New Orleans, LA. 70116. Second Edition, 1997. pp. 30—31.)

Biology: the blood lens

Race as a biological concept was created in 15th century Spain by the Spanish Inquisition, in 1492, just as Columbus was sailing the ocean blue — and getting lost — the Christian kingdom of Ferdinand and Isabella succeeded in driving out the Moors (African and Arab Muslims) who had ruled the Iberian Peninsula since 721 A.D.

Under Moorish rule, Spain had been the center of European culture. The Moors built 11 universities, thousands of book stores, hot and cold running water perfumed with roses, and a system of public baths for poor as well as rich. Moorish cities were centers of trade with Africa and Asia. Jewish people flourished during the Moorish empire; they had major roles in education and commerce, and were treated more justly than at any other time in European history.

But the Christian conquest changed all that. The Inquisition demanded that all Muslims and Jews convert to Christianity or face expulsion from Spain. Many converted but practiced their religions in secret. So the Inquisition established the infamous practice of "limpieza de sangra" testing the blood as well as the family tree of Moors and Jews to ferret out non—Christians. One drop of “dark” blood and you were out!

The tradition of one drop of dark blood lived on in the apartheid South. Until very recently, If you lived in South Carolina and had 1/16 Black ancestry, you were legally classified as Black. If you lived in Louisiana, the percentage was 1/32. So crossing state lines could change your ancestry!

Is it a coincidence that Inquisitors did their “racial blood tests” wearing long white robes and pointed white hoods?

“infidels and Savages:” the Christianity lens

In the 16th and 17th centuries, European conquistadors needed to create a theological justification for their conquest of the Americas and Africa. How could they steal the land inhabited and cherished by millions of indigenous people and not be considered thieves? How could they kidnap and enslave and murder millions of African peoples and still be good Christians? How could they annihilate whole nations of indigenous people and not go to hell?

Spain and Portugal, good Catholic countries, sought out the wisdom of the Pope who clarified

their Christian duty for them. It's OK to take the land of an "infidel" (one who does not practice Christianity) because an "infidel," by definition has violated Christian law. If the 'infidel' protests, it's appropriate to kill him. It's important to enslave someone who is a "savage" (one who does not practice European culture) to teach the enslaved person the virtues of "civilization." As a matter of fact, you're doing him or her a Christian favor, by removing his/her sinful ways.

African slavery could also be justified by Christian symbolism that pre—dated any European contact with African peoples. In Christianity, the color black is associated with death or evil; the color white with life, goodness and purity. So when the light skin Englishmen met dark skin Africans, the Englishmen justified their brutal treatment of Africans by the notion that white 'good' was conquering black 'evil.' Check out the terms "black" and "white" in the dictionary; these absurd connotations still exist.

The "Scientific" lens

The 18th and 19th centuries were the height of European colonialism of Africa. By this period, Christianity's hegemony over European values and ideology was being seriously challenged by the scientific revolution. European Intellectuals had to come up with a new world view to justify their nations' conquest of Africa. So, 'scientists' created the racial categories of Mongoloid, Negroid and Caucasoid and assigned them to a hierarchy in the human family: (1) Caucasoid (2) Mongoloid (3) Negroid. These categories are still taught in some U.S. schools today.

Mongolia was presumably the historical home of "mongoloids" or people of Asian descent. If you check the dictionary you'll find that an "obsolete" meaning of "mongoloid" is an idiot. (A far cry from today's stereotype of "the model minority.")

The Caucasus, the steppes of Russia, was the ostensible homeland of Caucasoids or Caucasians. Conveniently, a skull was found there with a larger cranium than others discovered, indicating to the scientific racists that people of European descent had more brain power than darker folks did! But what about Negroids? Where is Negro land? And if "negroids" came from Africa, how come they weren't called "africoids?" The answer, I think, lies in the ideological justification for slavery. White people had to dehumanize people of African descent in order to convince themselves that Africans could do nothing useful except perform enslaved labor.

If a people has no homeland, they have no history, no culture, no civilization. They are not really "a people." Hence, their "racial category" is not named after their continent, but after their 'race,' - "Negro." ('Negro' is the English term for the Spanish word "negro," which means "black." Spain was the first European country to institute the trans-Atlantic slave trade.)

U.S. Race-colored glasses

The worldview based on 'race' was created by Europeans in the 15th century to justify and legitimize European conquest of Africa and the Americas, and the genocide and system of slavery which resulted from this conquest. European Americans added some key aspects to the 'race' lens as they colonized and conquered the lands that were once called "Turtle Island."

A human being is renamed a 'slave:' the economic lens of race

As Elizabeth Martinez pointed out in her essay, "What is White Supremacy?," the wealth that initially made the United States possible as an independent nation—state was created when European colonialists stole the land of Native Americans, kidnaped people from Africa and forced

both Africans and Native Americans into a system of enslaved labor. Stolen land, genocide and enslaved labor provided the initial capital of capitalism.

Few U.S. history textbooks describe the origins of the U.S. economic system in this way. Nor do they describe in great detail how Europeans created the world's first system of racially—based slavery. The Africans who were brought to Virginia in 1619 were 'captives' but they were not yet 'slaves.' Their economic status was ambiguous: some remained in bondage to an English colonialist for a lifetime, while others were freed.

Yet by 1662, the colonists passed a law stating that the status of a child born to an African woman, but fathered by an Englishman, would be 'bond or free' depending on the status of the mother. This was the beginning of racialized slavery. In another few generations, colonizers used the terms 'Negro' and 'slave' interchangeably, if an African was not enslaved, she or he would be specifically identified as "a free Negro." The implication of this usage was clear: the colonizers assumed that all enslaved people were of African descent, and that the only status appropriate to people of African descent was that of a slave.

Race: the lens of 'subhumanity'

A corollary of viewing race through an economic lens is viewing 'racialized' people as subhumans. If the only possible status for a person of African descent is as a slave, how do you account for the thousands of free Africans in the colonial and post independence period? Reduce their humanity, culturally and legally, until it is as close as possible to the status of "slave."

In colonial South Carolina, an enslaved African who was manumitted (freed from slavery) by a white owner had to leave the colony within a few months, or else be liable to legal re—enslavement. During the era of Jacksonian "democracy," the right to vote was taken away from Pennsylvania free people of African descent at the same time as voting restrictions were lifted on all new Irish immigrants. Visual images of African Americans often resembled animals more than humans (see Marvin Riggs' superb film, *Ethnic Notions*).

The notion of indigenous people as more akin to animals than human beings is at the basis of U.S. policy toward Native Americans. In 1784 George Washington, famous Indian fighter, large landholder and slave owner, advised the Continental Congress that it would be cheaper for the new nation to buy up Indian land than to make war on Indian people for the land. If you make war, Washington cautioned, "the savage as the wolf" — both wild beasts of the forest — will retreat for awhile and then come back to attack you. Washington's metaphor stuck. The young U.S. nation—state, and all sectors of European— American; began to view the Native American as a wild animal.

(For more on this analysis, see Robert Williams, "Sovereignty, Racism and Human Rights: the case for Indian self—determination." From a speech given at the University of Montana, in April, 1994. Robert Williams is a professor of Law and American Studies at the University of Arizona. Speech on tape is distributed by Alternative Radio Project. 2129 Mapleton. Boulder, Colorado, 80304.)

Race through the legal lens

Race was created as the law of the land in the late 1600's. The governing class of the colonies developed an intricate legal system to institutionalize the means by which they had created their own wealth from stolen land and enslaved labor. The Virginia "Slaves Codes, " written from 1680

to 1705, defined a slave as either an African or an Indian, a servant as a “white” person; banned racial intermarriage, stipulated specific forms of punishment for Blacks or whites who defied the system of racialized slavery, and even curtailed non—brutal behavior of owners toward their “property.”

(For a detailed study of racial laws in the colonial period, see A. Leon Higgin— botham, ~Jr., In the Matter of Color: Race & The American Legal Process: The Colonial Period. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980. pp. 19—60.)

(For an analysis of how European colonialists justified theft of indigenous land and extermination of indigenous people, see Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest. NY: Norton & Company, 1975.)

The Invention of the ‘White Race’

In the colonial period, colonial rulers referred to Europeans who came to the colonies as indentured servants in a variety of ways which differentiated them from African or indigenous people. They were called “Christians” to distinguish them from indigenous and African “heathens” or “savages.” They were called “servants” to distinguish them from “slaves.” They were also referred to by their country of origin (English, Scottish, etc.) to distinguish them from Africans. In early 17th century Virginia, legal codes relating to the regulation of the working poor of all nationalities, an African was usually called “a Negro,” followed by a name, while Europeans were simply called by their first and last names.

Note that these distinctions were made by the rich about the poor. The land owning law makers, who got their ‘right’ to own land and make laws for the Virginia colony by buying stock in the Virginia Company, had no need to describe themselves. These stockholders knew who they were.

But in 1691, the colonial legislators created a new legal category: “whatsoever English or other white man or woman, bond or free, shall intermarry with a Negro, mulatto, or Indian man or woman, bond or free, he shall within three months be banished from this dominion forever.” (Higginbotham, op. cit., p. 44 Italics added.)

Up until this point, the term “white” may have been used in dialogue, but never in law. And when it was used, it referred only to indentured servants. The 1691 law set several legal precedents that have profoundly effected the concept of race to this day:

- The first legal use of “white” was used to ban racial intermarriage;
- The law focused the punishment on the “white” lover;
- The law created a racial category, in that it covered all white people, men and women, bond or free;
- The law distinguished “white” from all other inhabitants of the colonies: “Negro,” “mulatto,” and “Indian;”
- The law created a new synonym: English equals white. By implication, when other European immigrants came to the colonies, they could be included in the new legal category of “white.”

Thus, a small group of colonial slave owners invented the "white race".

(For more info, see Theodore Allen, The Invention of the White Race, Racial Oppression and Social Control. Vol. 1 and II. New York: Verso Books, 1994 and 1997.)

The creation of a 'white' nation

The U.S. Constitution established the new nation as a white republic. Indigenous and African peoples were excluded from participation in the republic. The first law of the first (white) congress in 1790 banned all non-white immigrants from becoming citizens of this white republic. This law meant that first generation immigrants from any continent except Europe could not own land -- the main means of earning a living in the new republic -- because state and territorial constitutions prohibited non-citizens from owning land.

In the 19th century, European Americans ran over the remaining lands of indigenous nations in the West, made war on Mexico and took half her land as war booty — now called the Southwest or “Occupied America,” depending on your viewpoint of these historical events. These acts of expansion of the white republic were called “Manifest Destiny,” the god—given right of the white U.S. to conquer nations of color and establish them as colonial territories.

Today we still call the U.S. “America,” a linguistic expression of white nationalism (a term coined by the famous African American scholar John Henrik Clarke). Using the term “America” to refer to the U.S. ignores the existence of both Canada and all the nations south of the Rio Grande which are also part of the American continent.

Under the banner of white nationalism, “America” has brought “democracy” — under the barrel of a gun — to nations of color around the world.

Sexual violence through the lens of 'race'

One of the most pervasive, destructive and hypocritical myths to come from the concept of “race” has been the belief that Indigenous and African-American men are sexual predators on white women; and that all women of color are sexual vampires luring white men.

This mythology comes, I believe, from a white psychological projection which legitimates as well as covers up the socially sanctioned sexual violence by white men against men and women of color. White men have raped African American women as a matter of racial prerogative; then fantasized that Black men are raping white women. The punishment meted out to Black men, in particular, for this crime committed by white men has been barbaric: lynching, burning and castration. And white women have bought this barbarity as the price they pay for “safety.”

(For more on this complex topic, see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Mind that Burns in Each Body,” in *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology*. Edited by Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins. Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1992. pp. 397—412.)

Another interpretation of the barbarity and pervasiveness of racially motivated sexual violence by whites against people of color, and especially against peoples of African descent, is the theory of the pre—eminent African American psychiatrist, lecturer and anti-racist activist, Dr. Frances Cress Welsing. In her “Cress Theory of Color -- Confrontation and Racism/White Supremacy,” Dr. Welsing analyzes the root causes of white supremacy. She demonstrates that the genes of white people are recessive as compared to those of people of African descent. Thus, if whites and African-descended people mate and create children, the family tree will have more darker skin offspring.

Dr. Welsing concludes that the virulence of white supremacy stems from white fear of genetic annihilation. In other words, if white/African sexual interrelationships become the norm rather than

the statistical exception, in a few generations there will be no more white people. An historical analysis of the pervasiveness of white fear of intermarriage, from 1691 to the present, lends much credence to this perspective.

Dr. Cress Welsing further asserts that white people keep this fear in their white closets. I agree. For over two decades, Dr. Cress Welsing has been a featured speaker at African American gatherings, and her book, *The Isis Papers*, is a best seller in Black book stores. But I have yet to see her name mentioned by any white writers on race, or any reference, supportive or critical, to her theories. It is as if white writers want to white her out of the discussion on race!

(For more info, see Dr. Frances Cress Welsing, “The Cress Theory of Color— Confrontation and Racism (White Supremacy) in *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1991.)

“Race” is just like ethnicity: the sociologist’s lens

In the aftermath of the Black Liberation Movement of the 1960’s, liberal racists had to develop subtler race lenses in order to gain white mainstream credibility. Chief among them was Nathan Glazer, the well known sociologist of patterns of European immigration. After studying the experiences of European immigrants who “pulled themselves up by their bootstraps,” Glazer then compared them with the experiences of African Americans in the same time period who did not climb the ladder of success. Instead of analyzing who gave the Europeans their boots, and kept the people of African descent without shoes, Glazer concluded that Europeans were enterprising, while Blacks were lazy.

Glazer confounded the terms “race” and “ethnicity.” Ethnicity comes from the Greek word ‘ethnikos’ meaning “a people, with a common language, culture, historical and geographical land base.” But more Important, Glazer’s theory laid the foundation for the “Blame the Victim” racist ideology, as well as the white backlash against affirmative action programs. in Glazer’s view, people of African descent were responsible for their own poverty and oppression. White America was off the hook.

Talking about ‘race’ perpetuates racism: the liberal lens

Our historical analysis has brought us full circle back to the well-meaning white person who says, “I’m not a member of any race except the human race.” All this talk about race is painful to her. Talking about race just perpetuates racial categories, she asserts. If we all forget about ‘race,’ it will go away. Returning to the original metaphor of this essay, I’d suggest that the young woman remove her race-colored glasses.

Anti-Racist Concepts of Race

Up to this point we have been talking about racist concepts of race, concepts created and perpetuated by Europeans and European-Americans. But there are also anti-racist concepts of race, most of which have been created by people of color in resistance to this racism. Most of these anti-racist concepts of race employ what I call “creating a culture of resistance,” that is, taking the oppressor’s language (their power to define reality and to convince other people that it is their definition) and redefining it so that the language becomes an expression of self-determination. A few examples:

Since the 19th century, African American people have used the term “a race man” or “a race

woman” to describe any African American who has devoted her/his life to the self-determination of her/his people.

In the early 19th century, Richard Allen and other founders formed the first all Black church. They proudly called it “The African Methodist Episcopal Church” at a time when the white U.S. population equated “Africa” with “barbarism.” Indigenous leaders refer to their people as “nations” instead of “tribes” with whom the U.S. government negotiated treaties as it would England or France.

Indigenous scholars and activists remind U.S. “historians” that the first great democratic document in what is now the U.S. of A. was the “Great Law of Peace” of the Iroquois Confederacy, not the Declaration of Independence. So much for “Indians” being “savages.”

In the 1960’s and early 70’s, revolutionary movements within communities of color used terms like “Black is Beautiful,” “Black Pride,” “Black Power,” “Red Power,” “Brown Power” and “Yellow Power.” The color—coded language of degradation was turned into a language of pride and community affirmation.

In response to the white nationalism of “Manifest Destiny,” and its current derivative, “illegal alien,” contemporary Chicano/a activists proudly wear T—shirts with a map of “Occupied America,” over the motto, “We didn't cross the border. The border crossed us.”

These are but a tiny sampling. I'm sure you can think of many many more.

Power

Race may be a specious category, but racism is very real. And it is deadly, because it is race backed up by power. The People’s Institute defines power as “having legitimate access to systems sanctioned by the authority of the state.” (Chisom and Washington, op. cit., p. 36.) Other definitions which you might find useful are: 000 Power is the ability to define reality and to convince other people that it/s their definition. (Definition by Dr. Wade Nobles) Power is ownership and control of the major resources of a state, and the capacity to make and enforce decisions based on this ownership and control.

When these forms of power are exercised against people based solely on the specious and arbitrary concept called “race,” the result is a system of racial oppression. In the United States, the most significant manifestations of racial oppression are:

- Individual racism
- Institutional racism
- Cultural and linguistic racism
- Environmental racism
- Militarism as applied racism
- Economic racism
- Health system of racism

(Thanks to The People’s Institute for this material.)

While our actions to challenge racism will always focus on some aspect of the manifestations of racism, we should not forget that these manifestations are the visible indications of an entire system that is built on the oppression of some peoples, based on the concept of “race,” for the benefit of other people, also based on the concept of “race.”

Racism and White Supremacy

Let's go back to The People's Institute's definition of racism: racism equals race prejudice plus power. Next, let's take a look at the "manifestations of racial oppression," mentioned above. Pick your favorite mainstream institution, and do a little power structure research. (See exercise on Manifestations of Racism.) In a race— constructed system, who owns or controls the institution? Who are the most privileged workers within it? Whom do the policies and practices of that institution primarily benefit?

Now, let's review the CWS Workshop definition of white supremacy:

White supremacy is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and peoples of color by white peoples of European origin; for the purpose of establishing and maintaining wealth, power and privilege.

I think it will be obvious that, if you're talking about the United States, racism and white supremacy are synonyms.

Structural Racism

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Structural Racism

Definition: Structural Racism in the U.S. 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. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy – the preferential treatment, privilege and power for white people at the expense of Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab and other racially oppressed people.

Scope: Structural Racism encompasses the entire system of white supremacy, diffused and infused in all aspects of society, including our history, culture, politics, economics and our entire social fabric. Structural Racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism – all other forms of racism (e.g. institutional, interpersonal, internalized, etc.) emerge from structural racism.

Indicators/Manifestations: The key indicators of structural racism are inequalities in power, access, opportunities, treatment, and policy impacts and outcomes, whether they are intentional or not. 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 producing new, and re-producing old forms of racism.

Individual Racism: Individual or internalized racism lies *within individuals*. These are private manifestations of racism that reside inside the individual.

Examples include prejudice, xenophobia, internalized oppression and privilege, and beliefs about race influenced by the dominant culture.

Institutional Racism

Institutional racism occurs *within and between institutions*. Institutional racism is discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and inequitable opportunities and impacts, based on race, produced and perpetuated by institutions (schools, mass media, etc.). Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they act in ways that advantage and disadvantage people, based on race.

Example: A police officer treats someone with racial bias, engages in institutional racism, representing a law enforcement institution.

Racial Justice

Definition: Racial Justice is the proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all.

Indicators: Equitable impacts and outcome across race is the key indicator off racial justice.

Interpersonal Racism: Interpersonal racism occurs *between individuals*. Once private beliefs come into interaction with others, the racism is now in the interpersonal realm.

Examples include public expressions of racial prejudice, hate, bias and bigotry between individuals.

Structural Racism

Structural Racism lies *underneath, all around and across society*. It encompasses: (1) history, which lies *underneath* the surface, providing the foundation for white supremacy in this country. (2) culture, which exists *all around* our everyday lives, providing the normalization and replication of racism and, (3) interconnected institutions and policies, they key relationships and rules across society providing the legitimacy and reinforcements to maintain and perpetuate racism.

Examples include racist history, dominant cultural representations, popular myths, and compounded and chronic inequities, etc.

Racial Justice

Racial Justice ≠ Diversity
(Diversity = Variety)

Racial Justice ≠ Equality
(Equality = Sameness)

Racial Justice = Equity
(Equity = Fairness, Justice)