

## A Glossary of Terms about Race, Racism and Culture

### General Commission on Religion and Race

| Term                                | Definition   |
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| <b>Acculturation</b>                | The process of interchanging cultural traits [customs, manners, values, etc.] among different ethnic groups, thus contributing to the further growth and enrichment of each one as one group adopts the values and traditions of another racial-ethnic group.  |
| <b>Cross-Cultural Communication</b> | Communication between persons from different cultures. It can be enhanced when individuals from the different cultures begin to interpret symbols in similar ways and when they have a strong desire to communicate effectively.   |
| <b>Cultural Assimilation</b>        | The process by which an individual or group acquires the cultural traits of a different ethnic or cultural group through integration.  |
| <b>Bigotry</b>                      | Intolerant prejudice which glorifies one's own group, but, denigrates members of other groups.<br><i>Source: National Conference for Community Justice – St. Louis Region – Dismantling Racism Institute program. 1996.</i>  |
| <b>Classism</b>                     | Prejudice and/or discrimination, either personally or institutionally, against people because of their real or perceived economic status or background.<br><i>Source: www.soaw.org (School of the Americas Watch)</i>  |
| <b>Culture</b>                      | 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.<br><i>Source: Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative. A Community Builder's Tool Kit. Claremont Graduate University, 2001.</i><br><br>Also, the behavioral patterns, symbols, beliefs, institutional values, social forms and material traits of a social, racial or religious group. |
| <b>Discrimination</b>               | Unequal treatment of people based on their membership in a group. In contrast to prejudice, discrimination is <i>behavior</i> . To discriminate is to treat a person, not on the basis of their intrinsic individual qualities, but on the basis of prejudgment about a group. Discrimination can be either <i>de jure</i> (legal as in segregation laws) or <i>de facto</i> (discrimination in fact without legal sanction.)<br><i>Source: Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative. A Community Builder's Tool Kit. Claremont Graduate University, 2001.</i>         |
| <b>Empowerment</b>                  | The act of providing means and opportunities for people - individually or in groups - to claim their right to fully live to the extent of all their capacities. It allows them to claim the totality of human dignity as created by God. It provides individuals and groups access to opportunities and powers to participate in decision-making processes affecting their lives.  |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>                    | An affiliation among people—often referred to as an “ <b>ethnic group</b> ”—who share a common racial and/or national origin and heritage.   |

**Ethnocentrism**

The belief that a particular group is superior and more significant than all others based on its ethnicity, culture, language, physical or social characteristics and aspects of self-expression.

**Inclusiveness**

Openness, acceptance and support that enables all persons to participate in the life of the church, the community and the world. Thus, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination. The mark of an inclusive society is one in which people are open, accepting and supportive of all other persons, enabling them to participate fully in the life of the church, the community and the world. In The United Methodist Church, inclusiveness means the freedom for total involvement of all persons in the membership and leadership of the church at all levels and in every place, provided their participation meets the requirements of The United Methodist Book of Discipline.

**Institutional or Systemic Racism**

The established social patterns which support, implicitly or explicitly, racist value systems. It is fulfilled through policies and understandings of official corporate organizations.

**Internalized Racism**

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 under gird 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 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 of white people and the systems they put in place and support.

*Source: Donna Bivens, "Internalized Racism: A Definition," Women's Theological Center, 1995.*

## **Oppression**

The systematic exploitation of one social group by another for its own benefit; it involves institutional control, ideological domination, and the imposition of the dominant group's culture on the oppressed group. Oppression is different from discrimination, bias, prejudice, or bigotry because:

- It is pervasive – woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness
- It is restricting – structural limits significantly shape a person's life chances and sense of possibility in ways beyond the individual's control
- It is hierarchical – the dominant or privileged groups benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups
- The dominant group has the power to define and name reality and determine what is "normal," "real," or "correct"

*Source: University of Arkansas - [www.uark.edu/~pride/archives/definitions](http://www.uark.edu/~pride/archives/definitions)*

## **Personal Racism**

The individual expressions--attitudes and/or behaviors--that accept the assumptions of a racial value system and maintain the benefits of the system.

## **Prejudice**

A positive or negative attitude toward a person or group, formed without just grounds or sufficient knowledge – will not be likely to change in spite of new evidence or contrary argument. Prejudice is an *attitude*.

*Source: University of Arkansas - [www.uark.edu/~pride/archives/definitions](http://www.uark.edu/~pride/archives/definitions)*

Attitudes or opinions, especially of a hostile nature, based on prejudgment and insufficient information about a group of people.

## **Privilege**

A right that only some people have access or availability to because of their social group memberships (dominants.) Because hierarchies of privilege exist, even within the same group, people who are part of the group in power (White people with respect to people of color, men with respect to women, heterosexual with respect to homosexuals, adults with respect to children, and rich people with respect to poor people) often deny they have privilege even when evidence of differential benefit is obvious.

*Source: National Conference for Community Justice – St. Louis Region – Dismantling Racism Institute program. 1996.*

## **Pluralism**

The acceptance and affirmation of the diversity of all people, races, ethnicities, sexes, cultures and ages.

## **Race**

A division of the human race [*homo sapiens*] according to particular genetic and cultural traits. Traditionally, we refer to three primary groups: Mongoloids, Negroids and Caucasians. There are various theories about the human race. One theory advocates that there is a continuum of human connectedness with no clear hereditary limits between people and virtually no genetic determinant of race.

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| <b>Racial/Ethnic</b>                                | A general term to describe people who are Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, Pacific Islanders and white. However, the term is often used to abbreviate “ <b>racial and ethnic minority</b> ,” in which case it generally describes all these groups except white people.   |
| <b>Racial and Ethnic Minority Racial Harassment</b> | <p>A descriptive collective name used to identify the five racial/ethnic groups within the denomination for functional or programmatic purposes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Abusive and/or derogatory language that in a subtle or overt manner belittles, humiliates, impugns, or defames a person or a group of persons based on racial and ethnic traits, heritage or characteristics.</li> <li>2. An individual, group or institutional behavior, which abuses, belittles, humiliates, defames or demeans a person or a group of persons based on racial and ethnic traits, heritage, or characteristics.</li> <li>3. Documentation, printed or visual, which abuses, humiliates, defames or demeans a person or group of persons based on racial and ethnic traits, heritage or characteristics.</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Racism</b>                                       | <p>Racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, supported intentionally or unintentionally by institutional power and authority, used to the advantage of one race and the disadvantage of other races. <i>The critical element that differentiates racism from prejudice and discrimination is the use of institutional power and authority to support prejudices and enforce discriminatory behaviors in systemic ways with far-reaching outcomes and effects.</i></p> <p>Source: University of Arkansas - <a href="http://www.uark.edu/~pride/archives/definitions">www.uark.edu/~pride/archives/definitions</a></p> <p>The combination of the power to dominate by one race over other races or ethnic groups that is grounded in historical assumptions and prejudice that the dominant race is innately superior to the others. Racism is a sin because it divides the human family by denying the image of God in all persons.</p> <p>"Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves having the power to carry out systematic discriminatory practices through the major institutions of our society" (<i>What Curriculum Leaders Can Do About Racism</i> by Delmo Della-Dora. New Detroit, Inc., 1970).</p> |
| <b>Self-Determination</b>                           | The right of all persons to determine for themselves their needs, aspirations and choices.   |
| <b>Sexism</b>                                       | <p>The oppression and/or exploitation of women based on gender.</p> <p>Source: <a href="http://www.awid.org/ywl/glossary/index">www.awid.org/ywl/glossary/index</a> (Association for Women’s Rights Development)</p>   |
| <b>Social Power</b>                                 | <p>Access to resources that enhance one’s chances of getting what one needs or influencing others in order to lead a safe, productive, fulfilling life.</p> <p>Source: Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, editors. <i>Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: Sourcebook</i>. New York: Routledge, 1997.</p>  |
| <b>Stereotypes</b>                                  | The arbitrary assigning of habits, abilities, or expectations to a person or group of people based on their race, gender or other visible characteristics; a process in which we tend to treat all members of a particular group as being alike.   |

Fixed impressions, or exaggerated or preconceived ideas about particular social groups, usually based on race, gender or other visible characteristics.

The danger in relying on stereotypes to guide our thoughts and actions stems from their being:

- Simplified ideas, whether negative or positive in nature
- Overgeneralizations that do not represent all, or perhaps even most individuals within a group
- Designed to enhance our own self-identity
- The foundation for prejudice and discrimination
- Obstacles in getting to know others for whom they are versus who we think they might be

Stereotypes are unfortunately learned at a young age, and they remain, as most mental models do – untested, unchallenged, confused with reality. Common sources of stereotypes include parents, other family members, educators, peers, media, etc.

Even “positive” stereotypes are harmful to those they target. They, like negative stereotypes, result in negative self-image, stress, mental illness, pressure to conform, and ineffective intercultural interactions.

*Source: Susan Pizarro-Eckert, “Your Guide to Race Relations” – [www.about.com/od](http://www.about.com/od). Adapted.*

### **White Privilege**

Is 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.

Examples of privilege might be: “I can walk around a department store without being followed.” “I can come to a meeting late and not have my lateness attributed to my race;” “being able to drive a car in any neighborhood without being perceived as being in the wrong place or looking for trouble;” “I can turn on the television or look to the front page and see people of my ethnic and racial background represented.” “I can take a job without having co-workers suspect that I got it because of my racial background.” “I can send my 16-year old out with his new driver’s license and not have to give him a lesson how to respond if police stop him.”

*Source: Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women Studies.”*

### **Xenophobia**

A pre-conceived and unfounded fear of everything that is foreign, especially to all persons from a foreign origin.