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DONATE

Overt and Covert Racism

Most of us recognize and stand solidly against *overt expressions of racism* such as racial slurs, violence, cross-burnings by the Ku Klux Klan, and practices of blatant racial segregation and discrimination. But overt racism is only the tip of the iceberg.

More often, racial discrimination is disguised and shows up in subtle ways (*covert racism*) such as implicit biases, microaggressions, and racially coded language. Often, people who say and do these things are unaware of the racism that informs them.

OVERT RACISM

Generally socially unacceptable

Hate crimes •
 Lynching •
 Anti-immigrant violence •
 Blackface/Brownface •
 Painting swastikas • Burning crosses • Racial slurs • The Ku Klux Klan • Public harassment of POCs speaking other than English

COVERT RACISM

Socially acceptable/practiced

White silence • Racial profiling • Denying institutional racism • Police brutality against People of Color (POC)/'Law and order' • Tone policing • "There's only one human race" • Invalidating or disbelieving POC experiences with racism • *Touting respectability politics* • Fear of

People of Color • Denying white privilege • 'Bootstrap theory' • Microaggressions • Rewriting history • Eurocentric school curricula • 'All Lives Matter' • Using POC culture as Halloween costumes • "You don't have an accent!" • "But they have Black colleges!" • Prioritizing white people as experts on everything • Denial of racism • Tokenism • Cultural appropriation • Treating children of color as adults • 'You're so articulate' • White self-segregating neighborhoods, churches, schools • "Where are you REALLY from?" • Weaponizing whiteness • Coded racist language and actions • "My intention was not racist!" • Racist sports mascots • Mass incarceration • Colorism • School-to-prison pipeline • English-only • Fetishizing POC • Meritocracy myths • "We need qualified people" • Eurocentric beauty standards • 'White savior' complex • Claiming 'reverse racism' • Colorblindness • 'Playing the race card' • Excusing/ 'white-splaining' racism • Mission trips

White silence—Often, white people feel that racial issues are not their concern, or that they don't have the expertise or the right to speak out about racial injustice. In fact, many blame people of color and white allies when they challenge racism, claiming that racism would go away if people wouldn't call attention to it. Because racism is a function of institutionalized racial discrimination, privilege, marginalization, and even violence that supports and protects white people, it is essential that white people who are concerned about justice work with People of Color AND teach other white people to recognize and interrupt racism. [Here's an example](#) of a white person NOT being silent, who uses her voice and her skin-color privilege to challenge a racist situation.

Racial profiling—Making negative assumptions about People of Color and acting on those assumptions personally and institutionally. Example: The police department institutes a "stop-and-frisk" policy targeting Black and Brown men in order to "reduce crime" because of the white community fears and prejudices about People of Color. Another example: Because most U.S.-born white people only speak one language—American English or American Sign Language—we don't value the skill of speaking more than one language and wrongly associate a lack of English fluency with lower intelligence. ("She can't even speak English!") Learn more about racial profiling [here](#).

Denying institutional racism—Assuming that racism is only at work when an individual white person or white group uses a racial slur, commits a hate crime, or vandalizes a house of worship, etc., with racist symbols and words. However, systemic and institutional racism are in the very bones and foundations of U.S. society. The wealth gap between white people and People of Color (specifically Black, Brown, and Indigenous) is considerable. The median household income

for a white U.S. family is \$65,000, while for a Latinx family it is \$50,000, and for a Black family it is \$40,000. This gap is due to historic racism in the labor unions (which protected workers and insured higher wages), in banking and mortgage lending laws, and legalized racism practices in housing, education, etc. Overt racial violence is but one expression of institutional racism. Learn about the [history of redlining](#) in the housing industry and watch this [TEDx talk](#) by Dr. Hephzibah V. Strmic-Pawl.

Police brutality against People of Color—Armed and physical aggression by law enforcement officials against People of Color date back to actions by the U.S. Cavalry against Native Americans and Mexican people, and legally sanctioned violence used against Black people during and after enslavement. The “armed militia” mentioned in the U.S. Constitution was as much about keeping Native Americans and enslaved Blacks “in line” as it was about keeping the British at bay. Until recently, police training included specific lessons on how to “deal with” Black people in their communities. Today, Black people are three times more likely to be killed by the police than white people, and they are 1.3 times more likely to be unarmed when they are killed. Black people made up 38 percent of people killed by police, although they are only 21 percent of the population. Further, in 99 percent of cases where a person was murdered by police, no officers were charged with a crime. (Statistics from [Mapping Police Violence website](#))

Tone policing—A set of tactics, tools, and catchphrases used by white people holding privilege to prevent marginalized people from sharing their experiences of oppression. Tone policing works by derailing a discussion (usually about a topic about which the “policer” is NOT central or an “expert”) by focusing on the emotions of the speaker rather than the message itself. It serves to allow privileged people to define the terms of a conversation about racism and other injustices before they are willing to talk about it. Or, it can be as simple as a white customer in a restaurant walking over to a table of Korean American customers and asking them to lower their voices because their “loud accent” is disturbing her dinner. Some other common examples: “Black people are so angry; that’s why we can’t have a conversation about race,” “Calm down, so we can discuss this like Christians should,” or, using reverse policing, “It is really refreshing to

meet a Latina activist like you who isn't constantly expressing outrage at white people like me." Check out [this video](#) on tone-policing by vlogger Emily Joy.

“There’s only one human race/ “I don’t see color”—White people often say this when the conversation about race becomes uncomfortable for them in an attempt to curtail honest, painful conversation and confrontation about the realities and the devastation brought on by racism. Yes, of course, God only created one human race, yes. And, as the Biblical story of Pentecost suggests, God also created and celebrated that human race comprises diverse tribes, nations, languages, colors, physical features, and cultures. However, since the days of Moses, racial bias and racial injustice and racism have been lived out by the human race. And racism at the personal and institutional levels is still a prevailing fact of life in church and society. To “not see color” is not to see the beauty of God’s richly diverse human creation AND also to ignore the real impact of racism that affects People of Color every moment of their lives.

Invalidating/disbelieving experiences of People of Color—When People of Color claim they have been affected by racism, many white people will immediately balk, saying, “Prove it! And prove it to my white sensibilities.” Other whites may claim, “I don’t think that’s racism,” or “That’s never happened to me.” People of Color have survived because we recognize what racism is and how to navigate a system undergirded by racism. In this, People of Color are *the* experts. A function of systemic racism is that it is often invisible to white people, in part because the entertainment and news media, educational systems, political and moral ideologies, even the church are all based on the belief that white opinions, white experiences, and white definitions are primary and “true.” White people are best in resisting and dismantling racism when they listen to, learn from, and assume the veracity of People of Color.

Touting respectability politics—Similar to “tone policing,” this idea started as a philosophy among Black elites during Reconstruction, who believed they could best “uplift the race” and end racism by correcting the “bad traits” of Black people and working hard to prove to white people that Black people are “just like you,” or “want to be like you.” This idea has similar expressions among other People of Color. This meant pursuing the American Dream through a college education and a well-paying job, raising families according to white standards,

keeping one's hair neat and straight, speaking "proper" English, and generally avoiding the appearance of threatening or being angry with white people. In contemporary parlance, it is often still used by elite People of Color and white people as the "appropriate" path to success and assimilation. Antiracism work, however, recognizes that the rules of "respectability" are just another way to control and silence People of Color, especially people who push against the "be like white people" narrative. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a married, educated, heterosexual Christian clergyman, who always dressed in a suit, spoke eloquently, and who masterfully used nonviolent civil disobedience. He was wearing a neat, short haircut and a suit and tie when he was assassinated by a white supremacist. And, while many white Christians were among those who mourned him, other white Christians openly celebrated his death, even in their worship services. People of Color who affect social, moral, and political change—from Gandhi to Mandela—all find that assimilation and respectability do not convince or convert those people who deny your very humanity.

Fear of People of Color—A group called The Perception Institute cites research about the phenomenon of "racial anxiety," which refers to the heightened levels of stress and emotion that human beings may experience when interacting with people of other races. It impacts People of Color, who may worry they will be the subject of discrimination and hostility. White people, meanwhile, worry that they will be assumed to be racist, or that People of Color, unless restrained, policed, and segregated, will mistreat white people as revenge for the way whites have treated People of Color. Further, white people have been taught subliminally to fear and "other" African-Americans and other People of Color. This causes a kind of feedback loop where their everyday interactions reinforce the fears and anxieties of both white people and People of Color. Read more [here](#) and see this [essay](#) on white fear of Black men.

Denying white privilege—In her groundbreaking essay, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," educator and activist Peggy McIntosh describes white privilege as "an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious and unconscious." Specifically, white privilege are advantages that white people enjoy that are generally not extended to the same extent to People of Color.

Even for white people who battle systems of racism, McIntosh says, "White skin opens many doors for whites, whether or not we approve of" such practices. Common examples: white people are seldom asked to speak for or represent their entire race; white Christians can visit most U.S. churches and find Jesus and Biblical characters portrayed as white; white children can count on school curricula celebrating heroes and heroines from their racial group; white people can remain oblivious to the language and customs of People of Color without feeling any loss or penalty because of that lack of knowledge. (Think: What if all U.S. citizens had to learn Cherokee or Shawnee to renew their citizenship?) One positive aspect of white privilege is that when white people speak and act against racial injustice, it often receives more attention and respect from other white people in power. Watch this [video](#) about a woman who recognized and used her white privilege to challenge racism.

'Bootstrap' theory/meritocracy myths—A common ideal among white people (and some others) in the United States is, "I pulled myself up by my bootstraps to make it; why can't 'they' [meaning People of Color.]" The assumption—which is false—is that every person or group starts with the exact same set of opportunities, resources, roadmaps, and privileges. With regard to race, gender, and ability, especially, the playing field is not level and has never been level. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed this in a 1967 NBC-TV, when he told a reporter that Black people historically have not had "boots," let alone bootstraps. Generations of land ownership have long been foundational in wealth-building for U.S. families, businesses, and colleges. When Europeans came to U.S. shores, the government gave them land to plan towns, cities, homes, businesses, schools, etc. Consider, during that same history, that Native Americans were driven from the land they owned onto reservations; African Americans were brought to the U.S. in slavery and, when freed from enslavement, were given neither land nor money to help them get started. Many Chinese Americans were lured to this nation to work for near slave wages to build the railroads to support white businesses and white travel. Native Hawaiians and Latinx people were "conquered," and their lands stolen by European "conquerors." In addition, often when communities of color began to acquire land and wealth, they were terrorized, felled by disease, and sometimes slaughtered by white supremacists. (i.e., the [1921 Tulsa Race Massacre](#), the [internment of Japanese Americans](#), the

Sand Creek Massacre, and the 18th-century decimation of the Native Hawaiians). To say that people should simply pull themselves up by their bootstraps denies the historic and ongoing pervasiveness of institutional racism and racial terrorism that has deprived People of Color of equitable resources and opportunities.

Requiring the 'emotional labor' of People of Color—This refers to racist *microaggressions* that People of Color regularly endure because of conscious or unconscious, systemic racism, and it can cause anxiety, depression, and even physical symptoms that take a toll on bodies and souls. This labor usually comes because People of Color are expected by white people to excuse, tolerate, and make allowances for racists' words and actions. Example 1) A Korean-American woman pastor, wearing a clergy robe, walks into a white church on Sunday morning, where she is guest preacher. A church member approaches her and says, "I hope you don't have an accent because I won't understand a word you say!" The guest pastor smiles and walks away. Example 2) A new Black male employee joins his white colleagues for his first staff meeting, and one of the colleagues says, "I'm really proud that we have affirmative action at this workplace." In both these instances, the white people involved make racist assumptions and assertions, while being almost certain that the People of Color will, at least, not call the white people out and, at best, may be offended but know better than to confront white people on their home turf. People of Color are expected to give white people the benefit of the doubt because they "just don't know better" or "didn't intend to be racist." This takes an emotional, spiritual, and physical toll on people of color, and affects how they move through a white-dominated society.

Rewriting history—This is a direct attempt to soothe or erase white people's discomfort with the emerging narrative of an entire social/political/religious system built on a foundation of racism. Recently, a group of so-called U.S. Civil War historians have advanced the narrative that the war was not about race or enslavement of Black Americans. Rather, they assert that the war was a revolt by the U.S. South against the encroachment of an increasingly unfair federal government. The presenting issue was that the federal government had proposed hefting a tax on slaveowners. "It was a battle for states' rights," the revisionists claim." Uh, ok. Yes, it was a battle for the rights of people in the U.S.

South to *own slaves and* not be penalized. Attempts to rewrite history to expunge the legacy of racism is demeaning to the people whose ancestors struggled under racist oppression. Recently, a leading publisher of textbooks for American public schools, proposed changing the word “slaves” to “servants,” to sanitize the history of slavery. A U.S. politician recently referred to enslaved Blacks as “immigrants” for the same reason. And fighters for racial justice, such as Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King have been reduced by many to images on kitschy, pop-culture T-shirt images, and their words and activism have been edited and watered down to sanitized quotations taken out of context. Watch this [video](#) about the debate about the cause of the U.S. Civil War.

Eurocentric school curricula—The United States is a rich gathering of thousands of cultures, ethnicities, other-than-English speakers, and diverse life experiences. Yet, the majority of children and youth in U.S. public schools (and in college/university level history classes and Christian Sunday schools) are taught from textbooks and curricula that give primacy to white American heroes and heritage, points of view, political and moral framework. To learn more about the contributions of People of Color, students must rely on their parents, extracurricular experiences, supplementary books, and electronic resources and guest speakers. And, while white history, culture, literature, and perspectives are taught every day, the stories and contributions from People of Color are often limited to racial-ethnic heritage observances, such as Native American Heritage Month (November). The images and stories in many “standard” U.S. textbooks and Sunday school are largely from a white perspective, with the stories of People of Color presented as “other.”

“All Lives Matter”—On the surface, of course, this is true. However, “All Lives Matter” developed as a backlash to the rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement by white people who inferred that “Black Lives Matter” means that others don’t. (When Jesus says, “Let the children come,” or “Blessed are the peacemakers,” he certainly didn’t mean that adults and non-peacemakers do not matter!) And some white people have sought to vilify or misrepresent Black Lives Matter’s message as violent and anti-white. This is false. Rather, the current movement asserts that Black lives should matter as much as white lives, but they currently do not in our society. In fact, BLM was developed in response to

the disproportionate number of unarmed Black people killed by law-enforcement officers in recent years. The movement has expanded to make more visible the reality that Black people across the globe are more likely than white people to have substandard healthcare, to live in unsafe housing, to die by violence, receive poor prenatal care, to be incarcerated and receive longer sentences for the same crime—all because of the long-standing institutional racism. BLM supporters are calling attention to generations of disparity and discrimination. See the guiding principles for Black Lives Matter [here](#).

Wearing people of color culture as costumes/sports mascots—These costumes and mascots are typically negative, demeaning caricatures, usually based on racist stereotypes and prejudices against People of Color and other marginalized or minority groups. Wearing blackface is an extreme example; at the same time, especially at Halloween, some white people wear Native American-style feather headdresses and buckskin, Mexican sombreros and serapes, native Hawaiian and other Pacific Island traditional dress, etc., for fun and laughs. While it may seem harmless and fun, before choosing the costume, ask yourself, “Do I know anything about the culture I’m sampling? Do I know whether or not any of these symbols have religious significance?” For example, many Native American nations attach specific sacred significance to feathered headdresses and not just any tribal member can wear them. Remember, one person’s dress-up-for-play may be another person’s sacred culture. A few years ago, for Halloween, a friend of mine (white guy, long hair) dressed as the stereotypic white Jesus nailed to a cross. He did it for fun, but we live in a Bible-belt community and, boy, did people shame and criticize and take offense at what they felt was “disrespect of their religion.” The same holds true for people who don’t share your race and religion. Understand that if you do sample/demean someone else’s culture, someone may call you out and raise a concern. To help decide if a Halloween costume is fun or appropriation, check out this [article from USA Today](#).

“You don’t have an accent”/“I don’t understand your accent”—Usually said to a nonwhite person born and reared outside the United States. In reality, EVERY person has an accent. For those of us who do not regularly interact with persons with diverse accents, it is a skill that can be developed by watching news and

information videos, sermons, etc., featuring people from different “accent” groups speaking English. To survive, people from language minorities learn the dominant language and often work to eliminate their “accents” in order to assimilate into and make themselves more acceptable to the dominant culture.

“But they have Black colleges”—Institutions and affinity groups for People of Color spring up to provide welcoming spaces for those marginalized in or excluded from white groups. A Latinx student council, an association of Asian-American pastors, the Bureau of Indian Affairs—all provide focus, support, and a safe place to network among People of Color, whose concerns are often ignored in groups dominated by white people. Many U.S. historically Black colleges (HBCUs) were founded after the end of the Civil War by *white* people—many of them Christians—who wanted to advance education for Black people after slavery was abolished, but who knew that racially integrated education was not possible at that time. In fact, these Black colleges and universities have all always welcomed white professors, board members, and students of other races. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of many historically white institutions.

Prioritizing white people as experts on everything— Listen to or watch a major news U.S. broadcast and chances are, the experts called upon to explain, interpret, predict, and address the issues are usually white. There are People of Color in almost every profession and field one can name; however, our society usually privileges white voices and white opinions as the most reliable, well-informed and balanced— even when the topic is racial justice and racism. A result of institutional racism is that People of Color are not considered by white society as reliable and trustworthy unless the expert is espousing a white cultural point of view, using terminology and even a speaking accent that makes white people comfortable. As one works to understand and resist racism, one must expand the notion of “expertise” to include and elevate the voices, experiences, and unique perspectives of People of Color.

Denying the reality of institutional and system racism—A prevailing argument encouraged among white people is that racism is simply animosity between people of different races, and that EVERYONE does it. However, this understanding denies the impact of institutional power which, when added with

racial prejudice, creates unjust systems that affect even the very lives and deaths of People of Color. Racism is racial prejudice plus power; in this society, racism is a white phenomenon, sustained by systems to keep white people “on top” of the social hierarchy. The Rev Joseph Barndt, one of the most respected Christian experts on racism, defines it this way: “Racism develops when personal opinion and individual bigotry are codified and enforced as societal behavior. Racism structures a society so that the prejudices of one racial group are taught, perpetuated, and enforced to the benefit of the dominant group. ...Racism harnesses the energies and loyalties of the dominant group for that group's purpose. Racism provides better service and facilities for the dominant group through the group's institutions. Racism decrees more severe restrictions and control over its victims than it does over the dominant group.”

Tokenism—This often translates as doing the least possible (adding a few people and policies, a little more money, making a vague and benign call for racial “reconciliation,” etc.) to appear open to racial diversity, while assuring that white people are not made uncomfortable or not challenging racially biased policies and practices in significant ways. Tokenism is a superficial numbers game that comes in response to People of Color calling for greater racial diversity in previously white-dominated spaces. In church structures, it may be hiring a Person of Color as associate pastor of a white church, while keeping the rest of the leadership (and the leadership and ministry focus on people who are) white. It may mean making sure to have at least one Person of Color in a visible position in your club, church, workplace, or teaching staff, but making sure not to hire “too many.” Having an all-white committee, but asking the Latina janitor to pose with the committee for a press photo is a more blatant example.

Cultural appropriation—When members of a dominant culture sample, borrow whimsically, or take elements from a culture (without giving credit and respect to that culture) of people who have been systematically oppressed by the dominant groups. Examples: When white people sport cornrowed or dreadlocked hairstyles (indigenous to people from the Africa diaspora), or when white designers create a clothing line that borrows *Chola* fashion from Latinx people or kimono from Japanese culture. (This is NOT the same as cultural exchange, which sees people sharing across cultures with a goal of mutual

respect and education.) Cultural appropriation happens when persons or institutions from the majority/dominant culture trivialize, “play with,” or capitalize financially (and in other ways) on minority or less powerful groups. (See also the entry, “Wearing people of color culture as costumes/sports mascots”)

Treating children of color as adults—Particular when it comes to law enforcement and the education systems, children and youth of color are often held to be more responsible for their behavior and choices than are white children, and are more likely subject to adult-level consequences. A current example of “adulthood” children is the detention of children who are Latinx in jail-like border camps for immigrants deemed illegal. Deploying police/resource officers in public schools with more children/youth of color is another example. Boys of color, especially Black and Latinx boys, are often labeled early on as being the “behavior problems” in school and “threats” when they are out playing or even just walking around. An extreme and tragic example is the 2014 murder of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, who was shot by a white police officer who claimed the child's toy pellet gun was a real firearm and that the child had threatened him. Watch this [2019 viral video](#) example of an 11-year-old Black girl's encounter with a police officer after she reportedly took more than her share of milk from her school cafeteria.

“You're exceptional”— (a.k.a, “You're so articulate” or “Your English is excellent”) When a white person says this to a Person of Color as a compliment, the implication is that the Person of Color: 1) is acceptable to white people because he/she/they talk, act, comport in a non-stereotypical way; 2) speaks or acts with confidence, intelligence, and calmness that makes white people feel more comfortable than they would with a “typical” person of that race; 3) exhibits competence and intelligence that the white speaker assumes is atypical for a person of color. Also, complimenting the English-language proficiency of someone who is Latin American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, African, etc., assumes that they were not born or reared in the United States and are as “American” as the white person speaking. (FYI, Puerto Rico is a part of the United States, so that even those who speak Spanish as their primary language are still 100 percent U.S. citizens. According to a report in *The New York Times*, 46 percent of Americans do not realize this.)

White self-segregating neighborhoods, schools, churches, etc.—Because People of Color represent nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population, it is relatively rare to travel across a town, city, or state without meeting any. However, institutional racism and historical economic inequity have made it possible for white people to self-segregate into communities, schools, social groups, and even churches. This dates back to U.S. government policies and practices re: housing in the early 20th century, which created legal segregation in communities that exists today. Institutional racism that led to segregation fed the implication that the more white people in a community the “safer,” “better,” and “higher” the quality of life. This is still the prevailing mentality that realtors use among white middle- and upper-income people. A few years ago in Nashville, Tenn., a realtor came under fire for an advertisement campaign to entice affluent (read: white) people to move into a re-gentrifying community, formerly populated by low-income People of Color. The ad hailed the emerging community as “more ‘neighborhood’ than ‘hood,’” implying that only moneyed white people create good neighborhoods. Learn more about the history of racism and U.S. housing laws [here](#).

“Where are you really from?”—As explained by the Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Kuan, president of Claremont (Calif.) School of Theology: *“Where are you from?” is a question that Asian Americans and other racial-ethnic minority groups have been asked far too often by people from the dominant group. If we pretend to be ignorant of what the questioner is asking, and respond by saying something like, “I am from Berkeley, California,” the next question will be “Where are you really from?” Such questions, primarily from the dominant white society, in many ways define the Asian-American experience. These questions, intended or not, seek to inscribe Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners and say to us that we cannot be real Americans. We are viewed as and related to as an “other.” The dominant culture says to us that we are not one of “us,” but one of “them.” Implicit, too, is the message that the United States cannot be “our homeland,” no matter how many generations our families have been here. The attempt is to return us to “where we are really from.”*

Weaponizing whiteness—Calling on the institutions or practices of the dominant culture to punish People of Color, whether intended or not. This is an ironic practice, in which some white people will deny the existence and impact of

racism, while simultaneously using racism and privilege against people of color. For instance, when white members of a white congregation in a historically white Christian denomination are allowed by the judicatory to plead, “not ready for” a pastor of color and have that request honored. Or when, in a dispute with a person of color, a white colleague might enlist a white supervisor or human resources manager to side with the white colleague (assuming that the concern is trivial or false). A historic example is that of a white woman using law-enforcement and criminal-justice systems to punish men of color by falsely accusing them of threatening violence, especially of a sexual nature. This serves to play into stereotypes that men of color lust after or want to harm white women, and to inflame white men in authority to “defend” or “avenge” the white women (i.e., the 1932 so-called “honor killing” of Native Hawaiian **Joseph Kahahawai**, and the 1955 lynching of **Emmitt Till**). Dr. Todd Grande, an associate professor in the mental health counseling program at Wilmington University, talks about a 2020 high-profile example in [this video](#).

Coded racist language and actions—Changes in laws and social codes of behavior have served to tamp down more overt expressions of racism in “polite society.” So, some white people and institutions have developed veiled language, images, and codes for perpetrating racism—many times unconscious, but racist nonetheless. An example from 2014, was the creation of a cell phone app that allowed people to report on, evaluate, and avoid neighborhoods that were deemed “sketchy” or “unsafe.” Without saying anything about race, the app (which is no longer available) rated communities of color, low-income communities, and immigrant communities more “sketchy” than white neighborhoods. Other examples of racist coding: screening job applicants based on their names; deeming Afros, twists and dreadlocked hairstyles as “unprofessional” in schools and jobs; justifying lack of diversity in hiring practices by claiming, “We want diversity, but we also want *qualified* people.” Race is not mentioned; however, the language and practices communicate racism.

“My intention was not racist!”—The Rev. Michelle Ledder, director of equity and anti-racism at the General Commission on Religion and Race, who is committed to lifelong work as a white woman seeking to understand and dismantle racism, says, “For those of us who are white, any attempt to defend ourselves against

being called racist, whether we are explicit or not in saying, 'I'm not racist,' or attempting to explain intent is, in itself, racism." Unconscious, implicit bias, and microaggressions born of institutional racism are so embedded in the white psyche that intent is not necessary.

Racist sports mascots—Symbols that demean and draw on unflattering stereotypes of People of Color cause harm to the targeted group, to other people of color, and to white people—especially children. According to a research on the psychological effects of the Washington football mascot, Native American adolescents experience a decline in self-esteem and a loss of confidence in their community and personal achievement. The same is true of advertising symbols that employ stereotypes of people of African, Asian, Latinx, Pacific Island, and Middle Eastern descent. For white children, these demeaning portrayals inures them against the racism aimed at People of Color, giving them the sense that Native folks are a thing of the past, to be caricatured. It may even affirm for white children that it is socially acceptable to abuse, ridicule, and dehumanize People of Color, and to perpetuate misconceptions about them.

Mass incarceration—A complex system of racial and social control in the United States, by which people—especially poor people and Black and Brown people—are imprisoned for longer terms than their white counterparts (and more than most other countries in the world). This system targets and labels these people as “trouble” and “behavioral problems, starting from when they enter the public school system. They are then disproportionately shuttled in the juvenile justice system at higher rates for longer sentences. Those who are released from prison move into a permanent second-class status, and stripped of basic civil and human rights, like the right to vote, the right to serve on juries, and the right to be free of legal discrimination in employment, housing, access to public benefits. This reality seeks to disenfranchise poor people and people of color. [Here](#) Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, describes this system.

Colorism—Defined by Nobel Prize-winning author Alice Walker, as “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color.” An offshoot of white racism, colorism is internalized racism that privileges lighter skin color over darker skin. This has been a challenge in the African-American

community since the rape of enslaved women resulted in Black families with children of different skin colors. (And the children of white owners, who were lighter-skinned, were often given some privilege their darker-skinned family were not—they were still slaves, though.) This is not just an African-American phenomenon, however; colorism is felt around the world, from India to Brazil. According to a *Time* magazine report, even the most liberal-minded progressive thinkers still display a bias towards light skin. “Dozens of research studies have shown that skin tone and other racial features play powerful roles in who gets ahead and who does not. These factors regularly determine who gets hired, who gets convicted, and who gets elected.” Learn more about colorism in the Latinx community [here](#).

School-to-prison pipeline—The phenomenon whereby system socioeconomic and racial inequities make children and youth of color (and poor white children) are more likely than white, middle- and upper-income children to be labeled “behavior problems” in school, see their behavior criminalized, drop out of high school, incur juvenile criminal records and end up in the U.S. prison system. Some sociologists claim that this is a planned “pipeline” to keep prisons full and lucrative, while disempowering People of Color and poor white people from economic success. Statistical data bear out these assertions. Black students comprise 16 percent of public school enrollment, but account for 42 percent of multiple school suspensions. (Compared to white students, who are 51 percent of students, yet only 31% of multiple suspensions.) Likewise, according to Pew Research, while Native Hawaiians are 21% of that state total population, they make up 40 to 60 percent of Hawaii’s prison population. And Native American/Alaska Native youth are three times more likely than white youth to be incarcerated, according to the *Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement*. See what students, educators, politicians, and advocates are doing in the state of Georgia [here](#).

English-only—A long-held belief by many U.S. citizens and residents that English should be the central or only acceptable and legal language of the nation. This dates back to the U.S. colonial period, when white invaders in the United States forced Native and Latinx people to learn English and to unlearn their first language as a way to divide and control the conquered communities. This

continued during the European immigration wave in the early 20th century, though white newcomers were urged to assimilate into U.S. culture by learning English and forgetting native languages and cultural practices. Although all people except Native and Latinx people in the United States trace their lineage from beyond this country (and, while other nations around the world encourage children and teens to learn more than one language as part of their education), many Americans people express anger, fear and revulsion for those speaking other languages as “subversive” and “unAmerican.” In fact, people whose first language is other than English are sometimes harassed for speaking other than English in public. Check out this [example](#).

Fetishizing people of color—Racial fetishism is when a person sexually objectifies and fixates sexual desires on a specific race or culture, usually without regard or respect for an individual. It is often heightened by desire for “forbidden fruit,” meaning people you can’t or won’t bring home to meet the family. Historical examples include rape of African, Pacific Island, Latina, and indigenous women by white slave traders and white “conquerors” during the age of global exploration. Instagram writer Lillian Sun defines it as, “sexual prejudice plus power.” Read an article featuring her theories [here](#).

Meritocracy myths—The myth that anyone who succeeds financially, academically, etc., rises only on her/his/their merit and hard work alone, and that institutional biases have no impact. In fact, institutional racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, etc., have had a direct and lasting impact on personal and group success. With regard to race, for example, recent research demonstrates that a white employer’s beliefs to a job applicants skin color, “accent,” given name, and even hairstyle often affects whether or not a person of color is hired. This has nothing to do with “merit,” and everything to do with institutional racism—whether or not the employer is conscious of it. [Click here](#) to find more examples in a recent study about science hiring.

“We’re not ready for a...”/ “We need qualified people”—An excuse for a lack of tangible commitment and action for recruiting/hiring/adding board members who are People of Color. As a society, we have been socialized to assume that white people who are hired and promoted are automatically qualified and the “best” person for the job. Conversely, the assumption often is that People of

Color are not as qualified and are seeking to “capitalize” on their race. Ask, “What would it take for us to become ready?” Usually, the answer is more time (as in, “After I’m no longer here!”), or if we can find a person of color who will not remind us of their color/ethnicity/culture/accent, and a person who is willing to behave as much like a white, middle-class person as possible.

Eurocentric beauty standards—Because the United States and Europe define and dominate popular media and the fashion and beauty industries, the universal standards for physical beauty have been cast in as those most reflective of what is ideal according to white/European tastes and preferences. Blond, straight hair, blue or hazel eyes, thin nose. These standards do change over time, and may include additions from other cultures and races as appropriated and deemed *en vogue* by the fashion industry (i.e., plump lips, tanned skin, rounder hips, dreadlocked hair). These additions are usually only considered beautiful if white people can appropriate them. What’s the harm? As early as age 2, children begin noticing physical differences and internalizing how significant adults describe and respond to physical differences. This can imprint false notions of worth, beauty, and ugliness on children, particularly girls. This is just as true for adults. Many studies have described the psychological impact of unrealistic beauty standards on women, and the more unattainable the standard, the more harmful it is. And racist overtones communicate to nonwhite people that they are not as beautiful and worthy as white people. Consider a story in *People* magazine’s “Most Beautiful People in the World” edition, which referred to a white Brazilian model, calling her blonde hair and light skin, “national treasures.” Are the majority of Brazilians, who have darker skin, hair, and eyes, not also treasures?

‘White savior’ complex—Although well-intentioned, some white people see their roles as “rescuing” and “helping” People of Color, mainly by donating and giving money, offering labor and hands-on support to children, poor people, homeless people, those in prison, and poor people outside the United States. Mission trips to poor areas, prayer meetings in prisons, soup kitchens, tutoring programs, holiday gift baskets, and food pantries may fall into these categories. While immediate, hands-on support is always needed, the underlying goal for “white saviors” is to make themselves feel good while maintaining the systemic status

quo. Often, “saviors” give in ways that maintain white superiority and maintain oppressive systems, rather than intervening in and addressing root causes, such as lack of a living wage, the school-to-prison pipeline, institutional racism, lack of affordable housing and health care, colonialism, institutional classism, etc.

Claiming ‘reverse racism’—This is a “race card” pulled by white people when People of Color call out racism and racial bias, or create a space that is not led by or dominated by white people. The claim is used to prove that “People of Color don’t have it so badly,” or that white people are just as “subject to racism as anyone else.” Reality check: Racism is racial prejudice backed by institutional power, so that white people are not subject to racism. Of course, white people may experience hostility, ignorant comments and even violence from people of other races; however, the U.S. criminal justice, financial, educational, political, cultural systems are in place to support and protect the interest of the white people and to penalize people of color who confront them. Learn more [here](#).

“I don’t think of you as...” (colorblindness)—This is akin to “colorblindness” and “I don’t see color.” It implies that, in order for white people to feel comfortable with, befriend, accept and interact with People of Color, they have to ignore or overlook race/ethnicity/culture. We are all created in the image of God and are all members of the human family, and our identities are shaped by our experiences, social locations, cultures, racial identities, etc. How we move through the world and how the world responds to each of us and our multiple identities comprise a significant part of who we are. So, to “ignore” or “not see” part of that identity means you may be missing a significant aspect of another person’s story.

Playing the ‘race card’—White people often make this accusation against People of Color whenever they call out institutional racism. While it is possible that a Person of Color may misinterpret a situation, action, or statement as racist, it is equally—and even more—possible that white people and systems are functioning with unconscious racial bias and microaggressions against People of Color. Their physical, spiritual, and socio-economic survival has depended on People of Color’s abilities to recognize and navigate the inevitable racism that is always at work. From the white woman who clutches her purse in fear whenever a Latinx youth joins her on the elevator to the white human resources director

who assumes that a Black applicant will be a “problem” for their all-white staff, so decides NOT to hire the applicant, the reality is that the “race card” is usually in play, and, typically, it white people who are playing it, whether or not they realize it.

Excusing/ ‘whitesplaining’/interrupting—The Rev. Michelle Ledder, director of equity and anti-racism for the General Commission on Religion and Race, explains, that “whitesplaining” and interrupting People of Color in conversations about race are, in fact, “microaggressions borne of racial positionality. [They] signal white people’s belief that they can speak whenever they want, that what they are saying is more important than that of People of Color, and that white people have the right to control timing, content, tone, and direction of conversations. Especially in conversations about race, racism, and reconciliation – part of white people’s anti-racism work is to avoid, always, interrupting People of Color.”

Mission trips— While immediate, hands-on support is always needed, white and moneyed mission workers who travel to other lands often fail to learn and pronounce the names of people who are hosting them, or insist on taking pictures with the poor, dark-skinned children and youth without asking permissions of the children’s parents (something we would never consider in a white, U.S. context). Well-intentioned mission worker arrives, expecting to impose white, U.S. values on people who are not from those contexts, without learning and addressing how colonialism and a racially stratified global economic system has affected poor communities outside the United States. Nor is the focus of a mission trip usually to learn about the richness and contributions of the people in the host community. Before planning and taking a mission trip, ask yourself if the money would be better spent giving it directly to the community you hope to support and letting *them* build the schools, clinics, homes, etc. as they need them in their contexts? Also, what social concerns are you ignoring in your own community, country, or state to take a “mission trip” somewhere else? And how does racism related to People of Color in your own community inform how you support and work with—or ignore—their concerns? [Here](#) is a perspective on mission trips from the World Vision organization.

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