

*** Anti-Racism for Global Justice, a cws project: 'Definitions from White Privilege Puzzle'**

Universalizing White Experience

When "white" is presented as standard/normal/good, people with white privilege internalize this superiority and sense of being "normal," viewing the world through that lens. Images of leadership, beauty, "average Americans" in institutions like schools, the media and popular culture; presentations of history that foreground white figures and their influence; and other ways in which whiteness is made central lead to an institutionalized standard of experience. This phenomenon is often invisible to those who experience and benefit from it, just as the internalizing of superiority is often unconscious. For white activists, this demands fighting against the indoctrination that "my ways of organizing and protesting are the right/best/only ways."

Deracialization

Deracialization is to remove an issue from its context, treating it in a way that does not recognize the impact of racism or that reduces the priority of directly challenging those impacts. Deracializing an issue restricts the self-determination of the people who are most impacted by that issue to be defining their own struggle. In a white supremacist society, *all* issues intersect with racism; the privilege to reframe an issue without understanding the impact of race is not available to those directly affected.

Blinded by the White

Reinforced by deracialized politics, this is a blindness of white activists to seeing and understanding resistance coming from communities of color. 500+ years of liberation struggles on this continent have been led by people of color, from colonization on through today. The backwards idea of "recruiting" people of color into "the" movement, defined as white radical struggle, ignores this historical and contemporary reality. Instead of "recruiting" people of color into majority white organizations in an attempt to "diversify", white social justice activists can focus on participating in anti-racist struggle.

Contradictory Resistance

Non-ruling class white people are caught in the intersection of experiencing privilege and also oppression, and so their resistance often expresses this contradiction: protesting that which oppresses while fighting to maintain privilege. Along racial lines, this often has manifested as white activists sacrificing long-term strength and the goals of activists of color, in order to win short-term gains for their own agenda. The resulting dynamic has historically shattered the potential of various multiracial movements which were making real progress toward radical social change.



These definitions are used by **Anti-Racism for Global Justice**, a project of the Challenging White Supremacy Workshops.

The Strategy of the Slave Owners

CWS

In 17th century Virginia, slave-owning colonial rulers, faced with armed rebellion by African and European servants, created a strategy to prevent the oppressed majority from uniting against the colonial ruling class. They made "white" a legal concept to describe poor Europeans. They gave "white" servants, who demanded better treatment for themselves only, certain privileges (land, freedom, an opportunity for a job on the slave patrol, and a tiny bit of access to those with political power), but severely punished "whites" who organized with Africans. They maximized the oppression of Africans by solidifying chattel slavery, and they justified their actions by asserting the "superiority of the white race" and the "inferiority of non-white races."

The strategy was brilliant. The punishments deterred all but the most courageous Europeans from organizing with Africans or Native Americans. The privileges wiped out much of the material basis for unity between the most oppressed Europeans and all Africans by giving freedom to the poor Europeans while enslaving the Africans. And poor European immigrants came to believe that the privileges given them by the ruling class were, in fact, their entitlements as 'white people.'

The strategy set a precedent which still works today. Virtually all the politically progressive movements led by white activists, historically and in the present, (trade unions, women, farmers, political reformers, environmentalists; queers and transgendered activists, peace and anti-intervention, etc.,) have recreated, consciously or unconsciously, the structures and culture of white privilege.

For example, trade unions, especially in California, were organized effectively on the basis of excluding African American, Chinese and Mexican workers. White women did get the vote, after 100 years of struggle, by supporting white supremacy in the South. Mainstream environmental organizations have preserved the spotted owl, while seldom challenging environmental pollution in communities of color. And white activists continue to ask activists of color to join predominantly white movements, offering little or no support for their issues and movements in return.

When oppressed whites protest militantly against our own oppression, while refusing to simultaneously challenge racial oppression and white privilege, we can win short term victories (a union, legislative reform, a constitutional amendment, a temporary shift in foreign policy, an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency). But when we organize in this way, we become accomplices in the oppression of people of color. Silence is consent to racial oppression and white privilege. We sacrifice the coalitions and alliances with activists of color which could challenge the power of the descendants of the slave owners -- a power which continues to oppress all of us today.

And, as moral and spiritual human beings, we are frustrated and outraged because we lack sufficient power to stop the U.S. government from murdering peoples of color, locally and globally -- in our name.