

UNCLE SAM THE PUSHER MAN



**THE
INSTITUTIONS
OF WHITE
SUPREMACY**

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A. DEFINITIONS

- 1. An institution is an organized expression of the way a society achieves its goals.**

For example, San Francisco State University is an institution whose purpose is to provide a college education to a certain proportion of California residents and visitors. Each Department in the University functions as a mini-institution within the larger one.

- 2. A system is a grouping of institutions organized to express the way a society achieves its goals.** For example, San Francisco State University is part of a *system* of state funded universities known as the California State University system. This system is itself part of a larger complex called *the educational system* which includes all levels of educational institutions, public and private, in California; and ultimately, in the United States. Thus, systems can be seen as increasingly larger, more comprehensive ways in which U.S. society organizes its goals of educating its population.

The most important **systems** in the U.S. are: *economic, legal, family, education, military, political/state, religious, communications, health and social services, artistic/cultural/entertainment.* (Many specific institutions overlap categories of systems.)

(Thanks to Joe Barndt of Crossroads Ministry in Chicago, who presented most of this material at a meeting of anti-racist educators and organizers in New Orleans, June, 1994.)

- 3. Power: Ownership and control of the major institutions of the state.**

I refer to the people who own and control the major institutions in the United States as "the white male ruling class." They are a class because they are tightly organized in their own self interest of maintaining and expanding their power. Since the first invasion of these lands by Europeans, the rulers have been white, and have passed down their inherited wealth and positions to their sons. Now, in the era of transnational capitalism, some few people of color from Japanese corporations have become part of this ruling class.

Historically, the institutional decision-makers in this class have been men, although women of the ruling class benefit from the power of the men. And, since the early 19th century, white women have been legally able to own and control property independent of men. But until the past two decades, there have been few if any white women in seats of institutional power. That situation may now be changing.

(I do not view women CEO's or billionaires as a sign of feminist progress.)

- 4. Power: access to the people who own and control the major institutions.**

Access usually comes from an organized effort of those who already have white privilege. For example, the AMA (American Medical Association) exerts tremendous power, as a national organization, over both private and public health care policy in the United States. This power results from: (1) The social composition of the AMA: mostly well off white males; (2) and its capacity to organize and be a national spokesperson for individual doctors.

5. The white supremacy system:

"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 establishing, maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege."

Another way of expressing the same thing is a definition provided by People's Institute of New Orleans and Joe Barndt: *Racism is race prejudice plus power. Therefore, institutional racism is "Systemic institutionalization of race prejudice plus power."* I use the term "white supremacy" as a synonym for "racism."

B. THE MAJOR COMPONENTS OF THE U.S. WHITE SUPREMACY SYSTEM

1. **Racial Oppression:** The institutionalized domination of peoples whose ancestors came from the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Arab world by peoples whose ancestors came from Europe. The domination is based on both skin color and on ancestral origins.

2. **White Privilege:** Institutionalized preferential prejudice for and treatment of white people based solely on their skin color and/or ancestral origin from Europe; and exemption from racial and/or national oppression based on skin color and/or ancestral origin from Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Arab world.

3. **Capitalist exploitation:** The institutionalized rip-off of the land of indigenous peoples and the labor power of African peoples which provided the basic wealth for the white colonial ruling classes both in the colonies and in Britain. In the colonies, the accumulation of wealth enabled the colonists to wage war on Britain, declare their independence, and found the "United States of America."

With the founding of the U.S.A., more European immigrants could come here, most of whom would end up selling their labor power to the sons of the original white male rulers. This historical process brought livelihood for many and vast wealth for the few.

4. **Male supremacy:** The institutionalized domination of all women by white men of all classes. The original architects of the U.S. white supremacy system were rich white men. The first non-ruling class white beneficiaries of the white privilege system were middle and working class white men.

But white women have also benefited from living in a white supremacy system, and most have actively supported it. For example, white women did not protest when their men slaughtered indigenous women to make room for homesteads for white women and men; nor did they argue against the forced separation of African families when they were brought here as slaves.

5. **Institutionalized violence:** Europeans founded the U.S. white supremacy system on theft, genocide, kidnaping and enslavement. Slave patrols, militia, lynch mobs, Texas Rangers, Border Patrols, police departments and the U.S. military keep the system going.

6. **Institutionalized perpetuation of white culture:** All the institutions in the white supremacy system perpetuate different aspects of white culture; and white culture is the matrix in which white supremacy institutions flourish.

C. THE FUNCTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL WHITE SUPREMACY (RACISM)

(Material presented by Joe Barndt of Crossroads Ministry)

1. Institutional racism (white supremacy) gives power and privilege to whites.

Every major institution in the U.S. was created to support and maintain *power* for the white ruling class and *privilege* for non-ruling class whites.

2. Institutional racism (white supremacy) functions to create individual racists.

Racist institutions create racist policies. People who work for these institutions, *no matter what their intentions*, must enforce these racist policies in order to keep their jobs. This enforcement may be active, or it may be silent by consent.

The policies of institutions affect millions of people who do not work inside them. The people affected by the racist policies accept these policies by their silence. For example, the Post Office is engaged in a work speed-up against its mostly people of color work force. I accept this institutional racism by silent consent every time I receive or send a letter!

3. Institutional racism (white supremacy) functions to create targets of racism.

For example, banks function to not lend money to businessmen and homeowners of color. Newspapers sell ads on the basis of crime stories which make criminals out of African American males. San Francisco landlords function to require exorbitant rents of poor people of color, thus creating a homeless population that is disproportionately people of color.

4. Institutional racism (white supremacy) functions to create a culture of white supremacy, or *white culture*.

For example, every single day in virtually every U.S. public school, in almost every classroom, children of color and white children are being taught lies about U.S. history which perpetuates the internalized racism of the children of color and the racism of white children.

D. THREE BASIC FORMS ON INSTITUTIONAL WHITE SUPREMACY (RACISM)

(Thanks to Joe Barndt of Crossroads Ministry for this analysis)

1. Legal Apartheid: From the first comprehensive slave codes in Virginia, 1705, to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, all major U.S. institutions were designed to serve the white community. This apartheid system was legal, overt, intentional, and national.

For example, after World War II, the federal government helped to finance the construction of thousands of suburban housing communities in the north. All of these new communities had *restrictive covenants* which legally banned selling a new suburban house to an African American family.

2. Covert Apartheid: As a result of the massive struggles of millions of African American people and their allies in the 1960's, apartheid was finally declared illegal in the United States. Black people could now "legally" move into white suburbs, eat in white restaurants and go to white schools. Major white institutions were forced to change their public policies at the risk of being sued for unacceptably (to them) high sums of money. But the original design and purpose of these institutions — to serve white people — did not change. It just went underground.

For example, in the suburbs restrictive covenants are now illegal. But banks regularly redline certain areas so that applicants of color cannot get loans to buy houses to move into the suburbs. Chicano and African American children can now legally attend white schools, but white teachers are not legally obliged (at the cost of getting fired) to respect these children, or nurture their young minds; nor are textbook writers required to sell texts to the schools that tell the true story of these children's ancestors.

3. Self perpetuating racism (white supremacy): Many white institutions, particularly small non-profits, alternative agencies and organizations, practice white supremacy "involuntarily" — participants in these institutions honestly believe their institutions are "not racist."

But racism is deeply embedded in the structures of the institution (Board of Directors, funding sources, major decision makers, processes of decision making, staff make up, responsibilities and functions, etc.,) in the policies and programs; (constituencies, members, relational work) in the politics (mission statements, world views, visions) and in the cultural expressions of the groups.

These organizations often try to eradicate racism in their groups by hiring staff of color, and having some kind of "diversity" training. These are good starts, but they do not address issues of fundamental politics and privilege: what kinds of decisions are made, who makes them, and who benefits from them.

Institutions of White Supremacy

* Graphic 'Uncle Sam the Pusherman' from a pamphlet by the Drug Research Project, a collective of San Francisco activists who organized successfully in 1973 against the first forced methadone program for arrested heroin users in S.F.

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