

Presented by Michelle Foy, Community Programs Director

## The Arc of the Triangle Press Release

We are writing to you after a very challenging week surrounding the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis marked by intense violence, both physical and emotional. The Arc of the Triangle denounces racism and is united in our support of our community, employees and families. Like many Americans across our nation as well as around the world, we are grieving, we are angry, and we are in pain. The week's tumultuous events are not just about Mr. George Floyd's death, but are collectively about the countless generations of black and brown people who have been grappling with the ongoing trauma of institutional racism and police brutality for centuries. The Arc of the Triangle has always proudly embraced diversity and inclusion and the unqualified value placed on human life. We recognize the reality that racism exists in our nation and we stand in solidarity with the black community and all people of color in the fight for true equality. We reject hateful rhetoric, harmful actions or attempts to diminish the value of all of our community members, while remaining committed to the fundamental right of free speech. Together, we must find solutions through necessary dialogue and a collective effort. To be silent is to be complicit.

**“White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” By Peggy McIntosh**

To read full essay go to:

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/what-is-white-privilege-really>

## Racism vs. White Privilege

Having white privilege and recognizing it is not racist. But white privilege exists because of historic, enduring racism and biases. Therefore, defining white privilege also requires finding working definitions of racism and bias.

### What is racism:

- “individual- and group-level processes and structures that are implicated in the reproduction of racial inequality.” **Systemic racism** happens when these structures or processes are carried out by groups with power, such as governments, businesses or schools.
- Racism differs from **bias**, which is a conscious or unconscious prejudice against an individual or group based on their identity.

### Racial bias is a belief:

Racism is what happens when that belief translates into action. Example:

- a person might unconsciously or consciously believe that people of color are more likely to commit crime or be dangerous. That's a bias.
- A person might become anxious if they perceive a black person is angry. That stems from a bias. These biases can become racism through a number of actions ranging in severity, and ranging from individual- to group-level responses:
  - A person crosses the street to avoid walking next to a group of young black men.

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- A person calls 911 to report the presence of a person of color who is otherwise behaving lawfully.
- A police officer shoots an unarmed person of color because he “feared for his life.”
- A jury finds a person of color guilty of a violent crime despite scant evidence.
- A federal intelligence agency prioritizes investigating black and Latino activists rather than investigate white supremacist activity

## Both racism and bias rely on what sociologists call racialization:

- This is the grouping of people based on perceived physical differences, such as skin tone.
- This arbitrary grouping of people, historically, fueled biases and became a tool for justifying the cruel treatment and discrimination of non-white people
- Colonialism, slavery and Jim Crow laws were all sold with junk science and propaganda that claimed people of a certain “race” were fundamentally different from those of another—and they should be treated accordingly
- While not all white people participated directly in this mistreatment, their learned biases and their safety from such treatment led many to commit one of those most powerful actions: silence.
- **And just like that, the trauma, displacement, cruel treatment and discrimination of people of color, inevitably, gave birth to white privilege.**

## What Is White Privilege?

1. The word **white** creates discomfort among those who are [not used to being defined or described by their race](#).
2. The word **privilege**, especially for poor and rural white people, sounds like a word that doesn’t belong to them—like a word that suggests they have never struggled.

Defining white privilege must often begin with defining what it’s *not* (because defensiveness derails the conversation).

- White privilege is *not* the suggestion that white people have never struggled.
- White privilege is *not* the assumption that everything a white person has accomplished is unearned; **Instead, white privilege should be viewed as a built-in advantage, separate from one’s level of income or effort.**
- **The more complicated truth: White privilege is both unconsciously enjoyed and consciously perpetuated. It is both on the surface and deeply embedded into American life. It is a weightless knapsack—and a weapon.**

## White Privilege as the “Power of Normal”

These subtle versions of white privilege are often used as a comfortable, easy entry point for people who might push back against the concept. That is why they remain so popular. These are simple, everyday things, conveniences white people aren’t forced to think about.

Examples:

- The first-aid kit having “flesh-colored” Band-Aids that only match the skin tone of white people.
- The products white people need for their hair being in the aisle labeled “hair care” rather than in a smaller, separate section of “ethnic hair products.”

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- The reason even these simple white privileges need to be recognized is that the damage goes beyond the inconvenience of shopping for goods and services
- These privileges are symbolic of what we might call “the power of normal.” If public spaces and goods seem catered to one race and segregate the needs of people of other races into special sections, that indicates something beneath the surface.

## White Privilege as the “Power of the Benefit of the Doubt”

The “power of normal” goes beyond the local CVS.

- White people are also more likely to see positive portrayals of people who look like them on the news, TV shows, in movies
- They are more likely to be treated as individuals, rather than as representatives. In other words, they are more often humanized and granted the benefit of the doubt. They are more likely to receive compassion, to be granted individual potential, to survive mistakes.

This has negative effects for people of color, who, without this privilege, face the consequences of racial profiling, stereotypes and lack of compassion for their struggles. In these scenarios, white privilege includes the facts that:

- White people are less likely to be followed, interrogated or searched by law enforcement because they look “suspicious.”
- If white people are accused of a crime, they are less likely to be presumed guilty, less likely to be sentenced to death and more likely to be portrayed in a fair, nuanced manner by media outlets

This privilege is invisible to many white people because it seems reasonable that a person should be extended compassion as they move through the world. It’s a privilege often not granted to people of color—with dire consequences. Example:

- NY City’s now-abandoned “Stop and Frisk” policy target [a disproportionate number](#) of black and Latino people.
- People of color are more likely to be arrested for drug offenses despite using [at a similar rate](#) to white people.
- People of color who were unarmed and not attacking anyone [were more likely](#) to be killed by police.

## White Privilege as the “Power of Accumulated Power”

Perhaps the most important lesson about white privilege is the one that’s taught the least.

- **The “power of normal” and the “power of the benefit of the doubt” are not just subconscious byproducts of past discrimination. They are the purposeful results of racism**
- **These powers would not exist if systemic racism hadn’t come first. And systemic racism cannot endure unless those powers still hold sway.**

McIntosh [asked herself an important question](#) that inspired her famous essay, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”: “On a daily basis, what do I have that I didn’t earn?” Our work should include asking the two looming follow-up questions: *Who built that system? Who keeps it going?*

- the ability to accumulate wealth has long been a white privilege—a privilege created by overt, systemic racism in both the public and private sectors

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- The gap, instead, relies largely on inheritance—wealth passed from one generation to the next. And that wealth often comes in the form of inherited homes with value. When white families are able to accumulate wealth because of their earning power or home value, they are more likely to support their children into early adulthood, helping with expenses such as college education, first cars and first homes. The cycle continues.
- This is a privilege denied to many families of color, a denial that started with the work of public leaders and property managers. After World War II, when the G.I. Bill provided white veterans with “a magic carpet to the middle class,” racist zoning laws segregated towns and cities with sizeable populations of people of color.
- These exclusionary zoning practices evolved from city ordinances to [redlining by the Federal Housing Administration](#) (which wouldn’t back loans to black people or those who lived close to black people), to more insidious techniques written into building codes.
- The result: People of color weren’t allowed to raise their children and invest their money in neighborhoods with “high home values.”

## What can I do once I recognize my white privilege?

### Don’t take it personally or use discomfort as an excuse to disengage.

- Feelings of guilt or defensiveness are common responses, but ultimately, they’re counterproductive
- Rather than centering your own feelings of discomfort, center the feelings of people of color in evaluating what to do with this information
- **If your instinct is telling you it’s more comfortable to retreat or reassure yourself that you are not racist, think instead, *What actions can I take to help?***

## Learn when to listen, when to amplify and when to speak up

- When people of color speak to their experiences of oppression, it’s important for white people not to dominate the conversation or question those experiences
- You can use your privilege to amplify those voices
- Share the work and perspectives of people of color on social media
- Credit colleagues of color for ideas. This not only helps marginalized people reach that audience but also helps spread their message from the source, rather than through the lens of a white person.

## When white people should speak up

- If you hear racist remarks, speak up.
- If you see opportunities to educate fellow white people about race, do so. As an ally, your privilege can be a tool to reach people who may be more likely to listen to you or relate to your journey in understanding your own relationship to race and white privilege.
- **Educate yourself.** You should not always expect people of color to take the lead on speaking out against racism, you also shouldn’t expect them to educate you on racism.
- Seek out books and articles on the topic written by people of color. Critically evaluate documentaries that surround topics like slavery, race, the U.S. prison system and more
- **Educate fellow white people.** Share what you’ve learned.
- Push through discomfort and demand courageous conversations in your circles. Do not let peers get away with problematic remarks without making a serious effort to engage them.

## Risk your unearned benefits to benefit others.

- It can be as simple as intervening if you see a boss or fellow educator treating someone differently because of their racial identity
- It can mean being an active witness when you see people of color confronted by law enforcement or harassed by bigots and letting them know you are there to support them and record the interaction if necessary
- And it most certainly can mean engaging directly in anti-bias work, such as instilling more inclusive practices at your school or business or working with people committed to allyship and anti-racist activism

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## Videos

- o Dr. Michael Eric Dyson- Discusses Civil Unrest Across America - YouTube- (host James Gordon) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sbo1RYyhP\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sbo1RYyhP_Q)
- o Systematic Racism: <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CA9ZCJZhlmW/?igshid=v7zahwb812e2>
- o White Privilege Used as a Weapon [Amy Cooper NY 5/25/20](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=iUQWd4q3tjA)  
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=iUQWd4q3tjA>