

What exactly do you mean when you say “White Privilege”?

Issues and Examples

1. Being white is thought of as simply being normal, neutral, or plain.

- Many white people say this - “I’m just American, just normal, I guess. I don’t really have an ethnicity.”
- “Where are you from?” is a question frequently asked of anyone who doesn’t appear white. Many people assume a person of color is not from the U.S. or want to know where they’re “really” from. It’s rarely a question that white people are asked.

2. White people often assume that people of color have a “chip” on their shoulder about race and/or racism.

- White people tend to listen to and believe other white people talking about racism more than when people of color talk about their experiences.
- Many white people are taught to be the devil’s advocate when hearing a person of color talk about an experience they have had dealing with racism. White people often ask “How do you know?” or “Couldn’t that have been because...?”

3. White people continue to hold the majority of powerful positions in elected government, media, and corporations, and they use these positions to wield influence in ways that may be unjust in application and/or result. Those in power positions can employ subtle forms of racism while claiming innocence and neutrality via “colorblindness”.

- Power remains concentrated in the hands of white people at top levels of government, media, and corporations. People in these positions often use speech that highlight their “colorblindness” to avoid dealing with a charge of race discrimination.
- People who speak openly about issues of race are often seen as the “problem”.
- Many people in power say that we should “look toward the future and not dwell in the past” as a way to avoid tackling issues of wrongdoing that haven’t yet seen justice.

4. The idea of “whiteness” has been shaped through literature, pseudo-science, and law to be considered “innocent”, “moral”, and “good”.

- American literature helped solidify what “whiteness” meant for a developing country of immigrants. Two themes running throughout were innocence and autonomy. Whites were those who represented the “new man”, those who were without corruption, innocent, and free.
- Early attempts to classify humans, long studied and referenced, described those descended from Europeans as “blue-eyed, gentle, and governed by laws” in contrast to other groups who were described using disparaging terms.
- Between 1790 and 1952, U.S. courts restricted naturalized citizenship to “whites”

5. Expectations of ownership, benefits, and deservedness. When attempts are made to rectify recent or long past discrimination, white people often claim reverse discrimination.

- Whiteness is associated with a feeling of “entitlement” amongst those who have been taught to expect good treatment and that they can be anything they want to be.
- White people who are used to feeling that they deserve all possible benefits often respond very negatively when people of color enjoy success or achievement that is perceived as being “rightfully theirs”.