# Race & Disability

For the Multicultural Affairs Committee

of the American Council of the Blind

1-3PM

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Presenter

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Facilitators

Multicultural Committee Members

## Ground Rules

For any group to work successfully, it is important to create an environment that is safe, one where participants can feel free to express themselves and to learn. In order to accomplish this, it is essential that all members agree to work from ground rules.

Everything that happens in the group is **confidential.** Nothing that participants share will be disclosed without their permission.

**Respect** other members of the group. There is permission to challenge ideas and points of view, not people. All opinions are worthy of discussion.

**All questions are good ones** and it is acceptable not to know all the answers.

**Listen carefully** to other members of the group. Allow others to speak without interruption.

**Speak only for yourself**. You do not know how others feel or think.

**Return from breaks on time.** Timeliness is a sign of respect for the facilitators and the participants.

Turn off all cell phones during the training.

**Be open** to new ideas, new ways of expression and the benefits they can bring. Be willing to take risks. Be willing to be vulnerable.

## Permission

1. “I give myself permission to make mistakes as I investigate my feelings around race.”
2. “I give others permission to make mistakes as they investigate their feelings of rage around race.”
3. “I give myself permission to express my emotions openly, honestly and freely.”
4. “I welcome others to express their emotions openly, honestly and freely.”

## Definitions

### Prejudice

A negative or hostile attitude toward a person or group, formed without just grounds or enough knowledge and is usually formed by an individual. Prejudice is an attitude.

### Discrimination

Unequal treatment of people based on their membership in a group. Discrimination can either be “de jure” (legal as in segregation laws) or “de facto” (in fact, without legal sanction). In contrast to prejudice, discrimination is a behavior.

### Stereotype

Fixed, widely held images, beliefs or assumptions about a group of people made without regard to individual differences. Unlike prejudice, stereotypes are held by a large number of people in society.

### Racism

Racial prejudices exercised against a racial group by individuals and institutions in a position of power. Power distinguishes mere prejudice from racism. Prejudice (an attitude) combines with the exercise of power (a behavior) to produce racism (a system). Prejudice becomes racism when it is practiced by the economically, socially or politically powerful.

### Privilege

An invisible package of unearned assets that people receive from society, but about which they are usually oblivious. Privilege is the opposite side of discrimination. It looks at the advantages people get because they belong to a group that does not suffer from societal oppression, instead of looking at the disadvantages people experience. Because of racism, white people experience racial privilege. Because of sexism, men experience gender privilege. Because of ableism nondisabled people experience privilege. Because of heterosexism, straight people experience sexual-orientation privilege.

## Definitions of Race and Ethnicity

### Race

Race is the classification of persons based on geographical origin and shared physical characteristics like skin color, hair texture, and facial features. Blumenbach (1752 – 1840) categorized humans into five racial groups. Caucasians: the peoples of Europe and the light-skinned peoples of northern Africa; Native Americans: the peoples of the Americas, Asians: the peoples of Asia, Africans: the darked skinned people of Africa and Pacific Islanders: the peoples of Australia and the Pacific islands.

Blumenbach and the naturalists who followed him not only classified, but also ranked the races. Persons belonging to the white race were on the top of the human hierarch because they were viewed as the most beautiful and civilized. Persons belonging to the black race were at the bottom of the human hierarchy because they were viewed as having the opposite characteristics.

Modern science uniformly holds that human racial classification are invalid. There is no biologically sound way to separate people into racial groups.

Although race is an erroneous biological construct for human, it is nevertheless an important social construct. In the U.S., race greatly influences everyday experiences and economic opportunities. The legacy of racial categorization still haunts us today in various forms of racial discrimination and prejudice.

### Ethnicity

Ethnicity is the classification of persons based on shared culture, which includes the language, traditions, history, and ancestry people have in common. Ethnicity is not the same as race. For example, Latino/as are an ethnic group, made up of persons whose ancestry is from Central America, South America, Mexico and certain islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Latino/a may be from different racial groups, however, including white, black, or Native American.

## Terms Used to Describe Racial and Ethnic Groups

### Black

This term was first used by Europeans in the fifteenth century to describe the dark-skinned peoples of Africa, India, Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands Later, the European colonists of North America used the term for both Africans and Native Americans and then, over time, for Africans only. Black was a shorthand for the relatively darker complexion of Africans, and carried pejorative implications associated with evil and uncleanliness. Today African American is often preferred, but black (either capitalized or not) is still common. The terms Negro, Colored and Afro-American are outdated; the first two are considered particularly offensive. Negro derives from Spanish word negro, which means black in color. Colored, once considered a polite name for African American is viewed as a pejorative allusion to the stereotyped notions of laziness, shiftlessness, and obedience that were attribute to African Americans when the term Colored was in common use after the Civil War and into the twentieth century.

### White

As a racial term, white now refers to people of primarily European background. Yet, the term is more recent than most people realize. British colonists referred to themselves as people or citizens or Christians, not white people, although others were referred to by their racial categories. In the United States, the term did not always include Jews, Irish, Eastern Europeans and Italians, although persons in those groups are considered white persons today. While a European background and relatively lighter skin is usually associated with being white, Asian Indians may consider themselves white despite Asian origins and darker complexion. Caucasian is a substitute and popular term for white, but as noted in the discussion of race, is a geographical misnomer.

### Latino/a

The term derives from Latino-americano and broadly refers to people from Latin America, which includes Mexico, Central America, South America and those Atlantic and Caribbean islands with Spanish and Portuguese linguistic and cultural origins.

It is therefore an ethnic, not a racial term. Although Latin peoples include not only Spanish and Portuguese, but French, Italian, Catalan, and Romanian, those whose languages derived from the Latin spoken by the Romans, Latino/a has a narrower Spanish/Portuguese meaning. The attachment of the trailing “/a” to Latino either “Latino or Latina.” Latino/a is a term used primarily in the United States. Persons living in Latin America usually refer to themselves by their ethno-national or ethno-geographic origin (Colombian, Peruvian, Puerto Rican, etc.) The term Hispanic is also used in the United States as a substitute for Latino/a, but is losing some ground lately. (As with the term, Latino/a, it is not widely used in Latin America.) It is an English language derivation of the Spanish Hispania, the dispersion of Spanish culture into the Americas. In etymology, Hispanic does not refer to persons with a Portuguese cultural background, but in common usage it includes those persons too.

### Asian/Asian American

These terms refer to persons of southern and eastern Asian origin. The term Asian American specifically refers to Asians who live in the United States. Although the continent of Asia encompasses much of Russia and the Middle East, Asian is commonly used as a racial category for person with origins in China, Japan and countries of Southeast Asia. Asian can also refer to persons from the Indian subcontinent, but Indian Americans or Asian Indian are often used to refer to persons from the country of India. Other person from countries on the Indian subcontinent such as Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh will refer to themselves according to their country of origin, not as Asian Indian. Asian is primarily a term used in the United State. Persons living in Asia usually refer to themselves by their ethno-national origin (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc.) Asian and Pacific Islander is an umbrella term that includes not only those persons from eastern and southeast Asia, but the Pacific islands as well.

### Native American

This term refers to the indigenous people and their descendants living in the U.S. and Canada. American Indian or Indian is also common, but for many, all three terms are viewed as Eurocentric, either because “America” was the name given by Europeans to the continent, or because “Indian” was the name Columbus gave to the indigenous people he found on his voyage because he thought he had landed in the Indies, the islands of Southeast Asia.

Often, Native Americans prefer to use their tribal names (Siksika) or “nation” names (Blackfeet) rather than the catchall terms above because those terms ignore distinct differences in culture and history. First Nation People and First People, which came into usage in the 1970s are substitute terms but are more widely used in Canada. Also note that in Alaska, the term Alaska Native is used to refer to the Inuit, Yupik and Aleut peoples.

## White Cultural Modes of Thinking Through Race

In a study of whiteness in the United States, Ruth Frankenberg has documented three modes white Americans use to conceptualize race and racial difference. Although these modes historically arose in the culture one by one, they presently exist simultaneously in the public discussions and private conceptualizations that white Americans hold about race. Elements of one’s thinking may draw upon one mode or another to varying degrees. But all thinking about race can be described as a product of one or more of these modes.

### Essentialist Racism (Racist)

* Dominant viewpoint for much of U.S. history
* Racial difference is understood in hierarchical terms of essential, biological, inequality
* Race is viewed as a biological category
* White superiority is asserted
* White superiority is used to justify economic and political inequities such as slavery and colonization
* Because people of color are different, they are inferior

### Color and Power Evasiveness (Colorblindness)

* Began to emerge in 1920s and is now the dominant viewpoint
* Racism consists of individual, intentional acts
* Denial of the differences race makes in people’s lives
* White culture seen as normative, correct, modern, universal, noncultural and cultureless
* White people should oppose essentialist racism
* White people should oppose race cognizance, to avoid division of the United States
* Ethnicity should replace race as a descriptor of difference
* We are all the same under the skin
* Culturally we are converging
* Racial others are the object of study, not white people
* Greater awareness of racial oppression of nonwhites than of racial privilege of whites
* Focus on people of color as racial, no focus on white self as racial
* Emphasis on individual identity
* Does not expect whites to name selves in racial terms

### Race Cognizance (Color awareness)

* Emerged out of civil rights and later movements for cultural and economic empowerment of people of color from the late 1950s to the present day
* Like essentialist racism, color awareness insists on difference
* Awareness of structural and institutional inequity
* Not seeing the difference race makes is a racist oversight
* Opposes both essentialist racism and color/power evasiveness

## Cycles of Racism

1. Systemic mistreatment of people of color
2. Which generates misinformation and ignorance about these groups of people
3. Which become socially sanctioned attitudes, beliefs, feelings and assumptions
4. Which become the justification for further mistreatment

Racism is one consequence of a self-perpetuating imbalance in economic, political, and social power. Racism hurts all of us, whether or not we are members of the target group.

## Internalized Racial Oppression

Internalized racial oppression is the internalization of black people of the images, stereotypes, prejudices and myths promoted about black people in this society. Internalized racial oppression causes black people to base their thoughts and feelings about themselves and others on these messages. It is a multi-generational disempowering process.

### Impacts of Internalized Oppression

* Low self-esteem
* Powerlessness
* Hopelessness
* Apathy
* Addictive Behavior (alcohol, drugs, food, sex, tv)
* Abusive and violent relationships
* Conflicts between different racial groups
* Mediocrity

## Internalized Racial Superiority

Internalized racial superiority is the internalization of the system of privileges given to white people in our society through racism. Internalized racial superiority is a multi-generational process in which white people receive, act upon, legitimize and masks that system of privileges.

### Impacts of Internalized Racial Superiority

* Exaggerated invisibility (the right to pull out and be silent)
* Obliviousness (believing that if one does not intend to do wrong that one has no further responsibility)
* Arrogance (If I do not know about some aspect of privilege, it does not exist)
* Addiction (to power and privileges)
* Distancing (distancing from bigots excuses own behavior)
* Setting agenda
* Setting norms
* Superiority complex

## Psychological Effects of Privilege

* Obliviousness: This is the tendency to not see the experiences of discrimination, prejudice and oppression of persons in the “unprivileged” group. For white people, it means being mostly unaware of the extent to which black people are unfairly treated.

A consequence of not seeing the experiences of others is that persons in the privileged group have difficulty empathizing with members of the unprivileged group. “Why are you so upset that the waiter ignored you?” is a common privileged response.

* Invisible: Persons who have privilege think of their life experience as “normal,” and will argue that they do not have a privileged experience, just a human one. For individuals who have white privilege this means that it feels natural to assert that being white does not feel special or carry any great significance. They may even deny that they are really part of a racial group at all, while they reap the benefits of group membership.
* Denial: Often the statement that follows, “why are you so upset that the waiter ignored you?” is “I’m sure it has nothing to do with race. That person is probably rude to everyone.” This denial of the experience of people of color arises because persons who have privilege think that their experiences are the norm. People with privilege find it hard to believe that others live so differently.
* Superiority Complex/Seeing Difference as Deficit: Most members of privileged groups are not taught overt messages about their superiority; however, because society reflects back to them the normalcy and superiority of their group, they grow to see people who are not part of their group as less than they are. The way this is communicated is usually subtle. For example, history textbooks that feature mostly white people and only few persons of color send an implied message that white persons are more important and therefore superior. These messages are especially powerful because although they are unspoken, they are reinforced throughout society in the media, workplace, organizations and government, but never talked about as “real” societal messages.
* Defining the Issue/Determining the Outcome: When John Wayne showed up, he got to determine that the Native Americans (Indigenous People) were the “problem.” Because he was able to define Indigenous People as a problem, he was able to dictate how they were treated. Never once did he ask the Apaches for their input. Often persons with privilege feel they have an unconditional right to define the nature of an issue. For example, wealthy people in our society often feel entitled to describe our welfare system as giving money to persons who are “lazy” and “irresponsible” to earn money on their own. That feeling of entitlement prevents them from putting much credence in the views of welfare recipients who might describe the welfare system as a “resource to meet the basic needs of all members of society.” Leaving aside which view is correct, because wealthy people have societal power, their views shape public policy, and because those views are skewed, those policies often lack empathy.
* Moral Distress: Almost everyone, including people with privilege, want to see themselves as good, moral individuals. Privilege puts its holders in a dilemma: It is wrong to be the beneficiary of an unearned privilege comes at the expense of others. The moral self therefore knows that it is proper to correct this unfairly privileged situation. Yet, the individual is also pressured to reap the benefits of privilege – which feel good – and not to incur the ostracism that arise for rejecting it. The result of this disjuncture is a moral malaise, in which the individual lacks the courage of his or her convictions makes it difficult to build a sense of community with one’s fellow privilege holders. No wonder white people often reject any group attachment to persons of their own race. Such attachment is seen as the province of members of the Ku Klux Land and other racist organizations.

Moral distress is really the bedrock upon which the other effects of white privilege rest. Because people want to feel good about themselves, it becomes useful to remain oblivious to racism, “invisibilize” one’s own collective racial experience of privilege, deny the racial experiences of people of color, and keep all those things in place with an attitude of superiority. And so, white privilege, like all cultural privileges, perpetuates itself through its effects.