

White Privilege in Social Justice Movements

These are four common patterns of the ways white privilege plays out in our social justice work. Catalyst Project developed this tool in dialogue with our allies and mentors.

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".

Key question: How has internalized white superiority shaped your assumptions about how your experience or worldview is "the norm"? How is this coming out in your organizing work?

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.

Key question: How is the issue we're working on a racial justice issue? For example, what is the relationship between white supremacy and prisons?

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.

Key question: What communities are you selling out for your own short-term interests? For example, what long-term goals are being thrown under the bus by your work/campaign?

Centered On the White

Reinforced by deracialized politics, this is a dynamic of white activists ignoring or misunderstanding 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 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.

Key question: Wherever there is oppression there is resistance. Where and how are communities of color bringing leadership and vision into the issue you are working on? What are some of the different ways that resistance is happening?

Anti-racism for Collective Liberation
www.collectiveliberation.org