

# EXPOSING AND CHALLENGING WHITE PRIVILEGE

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# DEFINING PRIVILEGE

- I am defining privilege as “greater access to power and opportunity.”
- You can experience privilege in some aspects of your life while having it denied or facing oppression in other aspects.
- Having privilege does not mean that your life is perfect. It means that an aspect of your identity benefits you by providing greater access to power and opportunity.

## PEGGY MCINTOSH'S "WHITE PRIVILEGE: UNPACKING THE INVISIBLE KNAPSACK" (1989)

- As a white woman, McIntosh noted that "I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group."
- "I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage."
- "I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined."

# EXAMPLES

- 3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
- 5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- 7. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
- 13. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
- 15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.

# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Which of these listed items is most impactful for you? Why?
- Since this essay was written in 1989, how might this list change in 2020? What would be added or subtracted to it?
- How do we challenge the criticism that each item on this list is a minor complaint, especially if each is examined individually?

# AUDRE LORDE, "THERE IS NO HIERARCHY OF OPPRESSION" (1983)

- Within the lesbian community I am Black, and within the Black community I am a lesbian. Any attack against Black people is a lesbian and gay issue, because I and thousands of other Black women are part of the lesbian community. Any attack against lesbians and gays is a Black issue, because thousands of lesbians and gay men are Black. There is no hierarchy of oppression.
- I cannot afford the luxury of fighting one form of oppression only. I cannot afford to believe that freedom from intolerance is the right of only one particular group. And I cannot afford to choose between the fronts upon which I must battle these forces of discrimination, wherever they appear to destroy me. And when they appear to destroy me, it will not be long before they appear to destroy you.