

# BE *the* BRIDGE

**WHITENESS 101: FOUNDATIONAL  
PRINCIPLES EVERY WHITE BRIDGE  
BUILDER NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND**

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## INTRODUCTION

Close your eyes and picture a racially reconciled body of believers. What do you see?

The image in your mind might resemble what the apostle John described in Revelation 7:9: "I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb."

What an inspiring picture! This is no homogenous group, but rather a colorful collection of communities, singing their praises to God in their own heart languages. We will carry our culture and ethnicity with us into heaven, and God will be glorified through the diversified expression of our unified praise.

This vision of the future provides insight about the kind of church we should strive to create in the present. Jesus taught us to pray that believers would mirror this reality "on earth, just as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). But how do we bring this heavenly reality to earth?

In a perfect, sinless world we would simply lock arms, love one another, and worship our risen Savior in perfect unity. We would see each other as image bearers of a loving God: each unique and beautiful, revealing the infinite, limitless nature of our God.

But we do not exist in that world. We exist in one ravaged by sin: our lust for power and control, our fear of those different from us, our greed and materialism, our need to denigrate others so we feel better about ourselves, and our propensity to lie in an attempt to cover up our guilt and shame. We have made idols of safety, order, power, wealth, comfort, and success, instead of living out God's commandments to love Him above all and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

All of this has contributed to the current state of racial hostility in our world, in our county, and in the church.

Jesus came into the world to reconcile the world to Himself and to reconcile formerly hostile communities to one another (Ephesians 2; 2 Corinthians 5). Jesus entrusted this ministry of reconciliation to the church. Racial reconciliation is not an optional aspect of the church or a niche issue reserved only for more "liberal" congregations; racial reconciliation is central to the church's gospel mission.

The church cannot whittle down racial reconciliation to an annual sermon series or an optional church committee. We can no longer push the topic away because "it's too political." If the American church remains segregated, and cannot or does not resolve to embody racial reconciliation as a model of heavenly unity in diversity, we fail in our effort to be a credible witness to the power of the gospel.

Historically, the burden of racial reconciliation work in our country has disproportionately fallen on the shoulders of people of color. As white people, it is past time for us to begin sharing this burden.

Racial reconciliation is difficult work. Racial hostility and segregation do not dissolve by coming together for a group hug, embracing “colorblind” ideology, or ignoring the sins of our past.

Reconciliation begins when we say, “I won’t stay silent and let the sin of racism ravage what God created as good (racial and ethnic diversity).” Reconciliation continues when we empty ourselves of our pride, as well as our need to be right, to be heard, or to feel understood. Racial reconciliation work will rip your soul into pieces and flip your worldview upside down. It is slow work that requires commitment, prayer, and sacrifice.

As white people, we often want to jump into the work of racial reconciliation with guns blazing, ready to speak out and fix everything! But we must learn that our first step is to engage in the disciplines of quiet self-reflection and learning. This way, when we go to our brothers and sisters of color to reconcile, we will come from a healthy place—a truthful place—where real and sustainable change and reconciliation can happen.

*Whiteness 101* will walk us through some of that initial learning and self-reflection. It may be used as a guide for private, individual study. However we highly recommend gathering a group of white friends and working through the reading and exercises together.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Let's define some terms. Conversations surrounding race often go awry simply because one or both parties have an incorrect or incomplete understanding of words and their meanings. Here are introductory definitions of some key words and, in some cases, resources for further learning on that topic:

### ETHNICITY

*Ethnicity* is a social classification of humans based on their common culture, heritage, nationality, religion, language, and/or other similar categories. The term is derived from the Greek word "ethnos," which in the Bible is often translated "tribe" or "people group."

### IMPLICIT BIAS

The [Kirwan Institute](#) defines *implicit bias* as "the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner...activated involuntarily, unconsciously, and without one's awareness or intentional control."

Article: [NCSC's Frequently Asked Questions About Implicit Bias](#)

### PEOPLE OF COLOR

*People of color* (often abbreviated "POC") is the preferred term for non-white people or communities.

### PREJUDICE

*Prejudice* is a preconceived judgment or opinion about a person or group of people, usually based on limited information and stereotyped generalizations.

Article: [Toward an Understanding of Prejudice and Racism](#)

### RACE

*Race* is the social classification of humans into categories based on a broad range of physical characteristics such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture. Racial categorization is not based on science, but on arbitrary distinctions which have shifted over time. Widespread usage of the concept of race did not occur until the 17th century, when European colonizers sought a way to legitimize a social hierarchy that placed light-skinned people in power and allowed for the subjugation of all others.

Article: [What Scientists Mean When They Say Race is Not Genetic](#)

### RACISM

*Racism* is a system of advantage based on race, involving cultural messages, misuse of power, and institutional bias, in addition to the racist beliefs and actions of individuals.

Video: [5 Things You Should Know About Racism](#)

### WHITE PEOPLE

*White people* is the term used to describe Caucasian people or communities, or those of European descent.

## ADDRESSING THE FOUR W'S: WHITE IDENTITY, WHITE PRIVILEGE, WHITE FRAGILITY, AND WHITE SUPREMACY

Conversations surrounding race in America are fraught with contentious rhetoric. On all sides of the issue, there is hurt, distrust, and misunderstanding. White people are often at a disadvantage in discussions about race, because most of us are not fluent in the language of race. For many of us, the few conversations about race we *have* been a part of were not positive or constructive.

It's common for white people to arrive at adulthood without ever participating in an in-depth discussion about race. Then, when we do attempt to dialog about race, we quickly learn that there are racial concepts and terminology unfamiliar to us. All of these things can leave us feeling insecure about how to begin—let alone sustain—a conversation on race.

People of color are often shocked to discover that a majority of white people rarely, if ever, talk about race, especially as it relates to their own identity. In other words, we don't often talk about *what it means to be white*. "Not having to think about our racial identity" is a very white experience. Most people of color are forced to consider their racial identity multiple times a day, every day.

While Americans of color vary along a spectrum of healthy awareness of their racial and ethnic identity, most do not make it far in life before being confronted with—at minimum—the reality that they are *not white*. From an early age, they begin learning about what it means to be (or not to be) white. Therefore, people of color often have a much deeper understanding of *whiteness* than white people do!

This isn't necessarily a criticism of white people. We simply don't know what we don't know. As white people, we usually have the ability to order our lives so that we never have to interact with people from other races. People of color haven't had that option. In order for us to competently enter into constructive conversations on the topic of race, we've got some catching up to do.

Over the next pages, we'll attempt to help you bridge some of that knowledge gap by exploring what we call "The Four W's": white identity, white privilege, white fragility, and white supremacy. A full understanding of these concepts will require a lifetime of learning. However our goal is to provide some basic onramps to get you started on your bridge-building journey.

*NOTE: Throughout this document, we've included many hyperlinks to recommended resources for continued learning on these topics.*

## STEP 1: DEVELOPING A WHITE IDENTITY

If you were to write down five words to describe yourself, how likely would you be to include “white” on the list? Highly unlikely, right? This is because to be white in America is to be a part of the dominant, or default, culture.

It’s quite common for us to grow up as white people, believing we don’t *have* a culture. “Culture” is what other groups of people have. We admire their colorful dress, their spicy foods, their exotic-sounding language. We feel we don’t have anything special; we’re just “normal.”

For instance, hair care products for white people fill an entire aisle in Target, which is simply labelled, “hair care.” But then Target may have a small, separate section for “ethnic hair care.” Why? Because hair products for white people are the norm. They are simply “hair care,” not “hair care for \_\_\_\_\_ people.”

We generally define ourselves (and others) by the parts of our identity that are subordinate (or non-dominant), while the dominant aspects of our identity remain invisible or unexamined. White culture is so dominant in America that, like the proverbial fish in water, many of us have never spent time examining what white culture *is*, or what it means in the greater American cultural and historical context. However, if we want to build healthy relationships with people of color, we have to first know who we are.

Because race is typically not on our radar, we sometimes fail to see just how *racialized* our society is. In their important book, [Divided By Faith](#), authors Michael Emerson and Christian Smith define a *racialized society* as “a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.”

Most white people find that they have neither a healthy way to describe their whiteness nor positive emotions to attach to those descriptions. It doesn’t have to be that way. As Beverly Daniel Tatum says in her excellent book, [Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?](#),

*The task for whites is to develop a positive white identity based in reality, not on assumed superiority. In order to do that each person must become aware of his or her whiteness, accept it as personally and socially significant, and learn to feel good about it, not in the sense of a Klan member’s “white pride,” but in the context of a commitment to a just society.*

The following questions will help us begin the process of developing a healthy white identity.

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION ON WHITE IDENTITY

*Take some time to write out answers to the following questions. (When we write, we are forced to form more coherent and complete thoughts):*

- What does it mean for you to be white?
- Name some characteristics of white culture.
- What is your first memory of becoming aware of race, thinking about race, or talking about race? What does that fact that you remember this experience say about how racialized our society is?
- How often would you say you think about race/racial issues?
- Fill in the blanks:
  - I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about attending a primarily Latino church.
  - I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about my children attending a primarily Latino school.
  - I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about sitting under Latino leadership.
  - I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about living in a neighborhood where all my neighbors are Latino.

Now go back and answer the same questions again, but replace the word “Latino” with “Asian American,” “Black,” “Native American,” and then “White.” Do any of your responses surprise you or cause you discomfort? Try not to suppress those feelings, but really sit there with them.

- Have you ever been in a room where you were the racial minority? For those of you who have, how did that make you feel? For those of you who haven’t, how do you feel about that, and what does that mean to you? When thinking about bridge-building, what is the difference between you inviting a person of color into your space, versus you leaving your space to spend time among a community of color?
- Name three white people who fought for racial justice or civil rights. If you struggled to name three people, spend some time researching to learn about some of these people and their stories.

Developing a healthy white identity does not mean drowning in white guilt or revelling in white pride. It is essential we learn (or rather unlearn) our history, and acknowledge the role we have played in the oppression of people of color. This self-examination can (and should) be painful. It can be tempting to walk away from conversations about racism and live in denial rather than face our complicity. But if we can push through, we can also gain a vision for how to capitalize on our identity as white people in order to bring about a more just society and to be a source of good in the world.



## STEP 2: ACKNOWLEDGING WHITE PRIVILEGE

*“When the officer pulled me over on my lunch break he did the usual questions, asked for ID, shined a light in my eyes, and asked if I was under the influence of any substances.”*

*“We were nearing the end of our long NICU stay and the nurse kept talking to me about procedures and follow-ups and what Medicaid would and wouldn’t cover, even though I had corrected the staff multiple times over our stay that we were on private insurance.”*

*“When I was signing up my three kids at their new school, the secretary asked me how many forms I needed for each of their dads. I’m happily married to the father of all of them!”*

These are true stories from three different black women. Experiences based on assumptions and stereotypes about black women that shape their daily reality. Experiences that we, as white people, have most likely never experienced. Because of our *privilege*. Our *white privilege*.

Some of you might be thinking, *What are you talking about? I’m not privileged! I never had anything handed to me! My family was poor, and we worked hard for everything we owned. My life has never been easy!*

But that’s not what we mean by the term *privilege* in this context. Remember when we discussed different aspects of our identity in Step 1? Privilege—and its opposite, *oppression*—are related to our identity. Everyone has parts of their identity that are privileged, and other parts that are oppressed.

As we move through life, this means that parts of our identity give us an *advantage*, where other parts of our identity leave us at a *disadvantage*. Social psychologist and theologian [Christena Cleveland](#) describes privilege and oppression as ways that society either *accommodates* us or *alienates* us. Privilege is about the way we are advantaged or disadvantaged by each category of our identity *compared to others in that same category*.

For example, let’s look at some of the major categories that define our identity: race, gender, class, education level, country of origin, language ability, and physical health. The most privileged positions in each of those categories are: white, male, upper class, highly-educated, American-born, English-speaking, and able-bodied.

Have you noticed how most positions of wealth and power in our country have traditionally been held by people whose identities include the most privileged positions in each of those categories? While we would like to believe that America is a *meritocracy*—that everyone has an equal chance of succeeding—the truth is that since our nation’s founding, privileged people have fashioned a society that advantages people like themselves, while disadvantaging others.

This is not to say that people who are oppressed cannot succeed; it just means they will have to overcome more barriers to achieve their success. This is also not to say that privileged people don't work hard; it just means they will have more doors opened wide for them, that won't open as easily for others.

It's usually easier for us to recognize those aspects of our identity that are oppressed than it is to recognize those that are privileged. Usually we've spent much more time processing the oppressed aspects of our identity because as we've moved through life, we've had to work out how to make a square peg fit in a round hole.

This is because of that dominant culture theory again: when our identity lines up with privilege, it doesn't feel special. It just feels "normal." However, where we have been privileged, not only have more doors opened for us, but we've needed to invest less intellectual and emotional energy toward thinking about how to open the doors, so we've been able to give more energy toward our goals.

African American sociologist and civil rights leader W.E.B. Du Bois first developed these ideas in his seminal 1903 work, [The Souls of Black Folk](#). He utilized the term "the wages of whiteness" to describe what we now refer to as white privilege.

In 1988, scholar and activist Peggy McIntosh coined the phrase "white privilege" to describe the benefits afforded white people in American society in her essay, [Unpacking The Invisible Knapsack](#). One of the most helpful aspects of her essay is a list of [fifty specific examples of white privilege](#) she experienced in her own life.

More recently, a former pastor put together [The Ultimate White Privilege Statistics](#), which breaks down the data across twelve categories of society, including work, school, church, healthcare, and the judicial system.

Until we see and understand the privilege that comes with our whiteness, we cannot accomplish the necessary work of dismantling this unjust system of advantage. We can begin to roll back racial injustice when we learn to recognize those places where we benefit from our whiteness, then leverage our privilege to open up access to those benefits to people of every race.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION ON WHITE PRIVILEGE:

- *Expand your identity awareness by taking this [online assessment](#).*
- *Learn more about the concept of white privilege by watching the following:*
  - ["Understanding White Privilege" YouTube playlist](#)
  - [2015 Justice Conference Racial Justice Panel Discussion](#)

### STEP 3: OVERCOMING WHITE FRAGILITY

*But I'm not a racist.*

*I'm afraid to say anything about race because I know I'll say the wrong thing.*

*I don't think this situation is about race at all.*

*If you are trying to call me racist, I'm done talking to you.*

*You're being divisive when you bring that up.*

*You're the racist, for bringing up race right now.*

*Why are you playing the race card?*

*I don't have a racist bone in my body!*

*Why does everything have to be about race?*

*What about reverse racism?*

*Since I'm a white male, everything's my fault, right?*

How many of us have heard comments like these when we've attempted to engage other white people on the topic of racial justice? How many of us have thought or expressed these sentiments ourselves?

These are examples of *white fragility* at work. Do you think you can figure out what is meant by white fragility from just those examples? Take time to write out some potential definitions. Here's another hint: You may also have felt some of it at work in your own heart and mind as you read about white privilege.

Professor Robin DiAngelo, in her [seminal essay on the topic](#), defines white fragility this way:

*White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation.*

Why do we, as white people, respond like this? How do we so quickly devolve into panicked "fight-or-flight" mode when others challenge our views on race?

Most of us live incredibly segregated lives, where our neighborhoods, schools, and churches are filled with mirrors of ourselves. Therefore we are able to sustain our belief that race relations in our country are just fine. We imagine ourselves as being free from bias or prejudice, and we remain unaware of the painful realities people of color face in our country.

Our segregation also allows us to avoid conversations about race, keeping us insulated from the stress these conversations produce. We haven't built up any "stamina" in this area. Our reigning ideology of the virtue of "color-blindness" has conditioned us to believe

that if we notice race, it is somehow a moral failure on our part, so we quickly suppress those thoughts.

At the same time, our white perspective has never been challenged; instead, every aspect of our culture has reinforced our worldview. So when presented with an idea or a personal experience from someone that contradicts the narrative we have developed about ourselves and our world, we often feel unbalanced or even threatened.

Our white fragility can leave the people of color in our lives feeling wounded, unheard, rejected, or angry. Our lack of resilience removes the possibility of pursuing true racial reconciliation. We must address our fragility in order to move toward our vision of Revelation 7 here on earth.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION ON WHITE FRAGILITY

First, read [Transforming White Fragility Into Courageous Imperfection](#).

Then read [Dr. DiAngelo's essay](#). As you read, write out what you learn about the following:

- What are the effects of white fragility?
- How did white fragility originally develop?
- What are some ways I've seen white fragility manifest in my own life? (Utilize DiAngelo's list of "triggers" to help you think through this.)
- How can we overcome our white fragility?

Now that you've been introduced to the concept of white fragility, start taking note of your emotional responses as you continue to learn about and engage in conversations with others about race. Practice developing your "stamina" by reading articles or watching videos (about race, or other important topics) with which you know you'll disagree.

*Robin DiAngelo has posted a number of her excellent lectures on whiteness, fragility, and racism on [YouTube](#). Make sure to check those out too.*

## STEP 4: RECOGNIZING WHITE SUPREMACY

For many of us, when we hear the term *white supremacy*, what comes to mind is visions of men in white robes and burning crosses, or neo-Nazi skinheads, or extremists like Dylann Roof, who entered the historically black Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston in 2015 and shot nine members dead. But the ideology of white supremacy is much more widespread and insidious than those specific images.

White supremacy can be incredibly challenging for white people to see. We know it's wrong to be explicitly racist. However we can easily miss the ways our worldview is subtly shaped by a sense of white superiority, or "white is right." It's not necessarily our fault; white supremacy has had centuries to embed itself into our country's conscience, therefore normalizing it. It's simply "the way things have always been."

The work of racial bridge building demands that we root out white supremacist ideology, especially from the church. In order to do that however, we need a clear picture of what we're up against.

In her essay entitled [What Is White Supremacy?](#), author and activist Elizabeth Martinez puts forth the following definition:

*White supremacy is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.*

Written records reveal that social scientists made specific assumptions about various people groups based on skin color, region of origin, and culture as far back as Hippocrates. However the word *race* didn't appear until the 16th century, and the concept of dividing humanity into a social hierarchy based on physical characteristics wasn't solidified until the 17th and 18th centuries. This racial classification system was developed by European countries as they expanded their dominion through worldwide colonization. Europeans needed a rationale to validate the subjugation, dehumanization, and enslavement of the non-European people groups they sought to conquer.

In 1779, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a German anthropologist and professor of medicine, divided humanity into five distinct races and assigned a color to each:

- Caucasian/white (Europeans and North Africans)
- Mongolian/yellow (East Asians and some Central Asians)
- Malayan/brown (Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders)
- Ethiopian/black (Sub-Saharan Africans)
- American/red (Indigenous Americans)

Blumenbach supported the *degenerative hypothesis*, which purported that Adam and Eve were white, and that over time some people groups degenerated from whiteness into other races. For the next 200 years, “white” scientists and anthropologists worked diligently to create scientific “proofs” that would provide further justification for the social stratification of the different “races.” Not surprisingly, the “evidence” always affirmed the supremacy of the white race. [SPOILER ALERT: Modern scientists have completely disproved the reality of race.]

Our country was founded within this context, firmly upon the principle of white supremacy, most obviously expressed in 1) the violent taking of Native lands, while offering Native peoples the choice of assimilation, removal, or death, and 2) the legalized ownership, enslavement, rape, torture, and forced labor of Africans.

It’s important to note that the white Church endorsed these horrific practices, and white Christian leaders openly engaged in them, both before and after the birth of the United States.

Many Americans believe white supremacy was defeated through Union victory during the Civil War and the subsequent abolishment of slavery. However white supremacy continued to shape American government and culture well after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox. Formalized systems like lynching without punishment, Jim Crow laws upheld in the Supreme Court, and legalized discrimination and segregation in housing and education demonstrated that white supremacy was alive and well. Both the Constitution and the Bible were referenced in support of these systems.

Many other Americans believe racial equality was achieved through the 1960’s Civil Rights movement. However white supremacy continues to cast its long shadow over our country even today. During two pivotal periods of time in our history (Civil War/Reconstruction + the Civil Rights Movement) our national conscience became troubled enough by the blatant expressions of white supremacy (chattel slavery + Jim Crow) that our government passed legislation guaranteeing better, “more equal” treatment of all Americans (13th/14th/15th Amendments + the Civil Rights/Voting Rights/Fair Housing Acts.)

However, after both moral victories, white supremacy fought its way back with a vengeance, both times morphing into more socially-acceptable and technically-legal forms (convict leasing/lynching + mass incarceration/“tough on crime”/“law and order.”)

Another pattern we see in American history is white supremacy being emboldened during periods of increased financial or geopolitical anxiety. During these times, white supremacy capitalizes on the country’s fear by scapegoating immigrant communities (financial crises: Chinese Expulsion (late 1800’s)/Mexican Repatriation (1930’s) + geopolitical crises: Japanese Internment/rejection of Jewish refugees during WWII.)

Here’s what we need to wrestle with as white believers today: during each of the defining periods in American history mentioned above, whether the shift was toward racial justice,

or away from it, the white church—and particularly the white evangelical church—chose the wrong side of the moral battle. Every time Christians of color cried out to us on behalf of the oppressed, we used our theology and biblical knowledge to instead defend our alliance with white supremacy and oppression. Every. Single. Time.

It's easy to look back now and declare with moral certainty:

- Slavery=bad, Emancipation=good.
- Slaveholders=bad, abolitionists=good.
- Mexican Repatriation=bad, civil rights and due process for all Americans=good.
- Plessy v. Ferguson=bad, Brown v. Board of Education=good.
- Segregated facilities=bad, equal access to public spaces for everyone=good.
- Bull Connor=bad, Martin Luther King, Jr.=good.

But in every situation, the white evangelical church got it wrong at the time. Only in hindsight do we see the error of our ways. In our pride, we like to imagine that we would have been on the right side of these moral tests had we lived during those periods of history. But humility—not to mention our refusal to learn from our mistakes—demands the uncomfortable truth:

- If we despise the #BlackLivesMatter movement now, we would have despised Dr. King and the Civil Rights movement then.
- If we like the idea of the “Muslim ban” now, we would have liked the idea of Japanese Internment then.
- If we are in favor of stricter voter ID laws now, we would have been in favor of literacy tests and poll taxes then.

There is only one way forward for us if we truly want to throw off the chains of white supremacy that have bound the white American church for 400 years. There is only one path for us to choose if we ever want to get on the right side of history. We must submit ourselves to Christian leadership of color and begin heeding their voices. We need to listen to their stories and learn their theologies. We must abandon our white Jesus and our white savior complex if we want to recognize and embrace the True Savior and receive forgiveness and healing from those on the margins.

This is our calling as white bridge builders: to model the subversion of our American Christian power structures, and to call others to do the same. Like most giant leaps of faith, choosing this path will require humility, confession, repentance, trust, loss, and a reorientation of our worldview. But if we can change ourselves, then we can change the church. And if we can change the church, we can change the nation.

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION ON WHITE SUPREMACY

- Take some time to check in with yourself. *How are you feeling right now?* Chances are, white fragility is rearing its ugly head, urging you to shut down emotionally or run away from this conversation. Try not to suppress those powerful, uncomfortable feelings. Instead, sit in them as long as you can bear. Process your thoughts and feelings with God. Ask Him for insight into why you are feeling the way you are. *What aspect of your identity or worldview feels threatened?* Write out your thoughts and feelings.
- Were any of the historical events mentioned in this document unfamiliar to you? Do some research to learn more about them.
- The period between when the first African slaves were brought to America and Emancipation was 250 years. The period between Emancipation and the Civil Rights movement was 100 years. The period between the Civil Rights movement and today is 50 years. The patterns of history seem to suggest we are living during one of those seismic shifts around racial justice right now. Ponder these questions:
  - What significant advances in justice and equality for people of color have occurred in the last decade in our country?
  - Where have you seen evidence of strong pushback from white supremacy?
  - In what ways is our country currently experiencing financial and/or geopolitical anxiety?
  - Where have you seen examples of white supremacy scapegoating American immigrant communities in response to these anxieties?
  - What role can the church play in speaking out against, disrupting, and dismantling current manifestations of white supremacy? What will we do to make sure we get it right this time?
- Watch the powerful documentary series about the history and science of race, [Race: The Power of An Illusion](#). You can also find an accompanying discussion guide and other supplemental educational materials [here](#).
- Read the following articles:
  - [The Faces of American Power](#)
  - [10 Things Everyone Should Know About White Supremacy](#)
  - [The Enduring Effects of White Supremacy in America](#)
  - [The Chasm Between White Theology and Black Liberation](#)
  - [Theologians and White Supremacy: An Interview With James H. Cone](#)



## BONUS SECTION: 16 BRIDGE BUILDING TIPS FOR WHITE PEOPLE

1. **Don't expect people of color to be your only source of education about race.** POCs get exhausted explaining the same ideas over and over again, every time a white person "joins the conversation." Read a book instead. Watch a documentary. Google it. If you must hit up your POC friend for insight, at least buy them dinner, and really listen to what they have to say.
2. **Don't take up too much (metaphorical) space in the conversation.** Yes, this is hard for verbal processors. We know you have important things to say. But white people's ideas and stories are prioritized everywhere else. Take this opportunity to sit quietly and platform voices of color.
3. **Don't compare your experience of oppression or suffering with a POC's experience with oppression or suffering.** Although you might see similarities between your circumstances, resist the urge to interpret a POC's experience through your limited lens. Your suffering is real, and it might help you feel more connected to or empathetic toward your POC friend. But your experiences are not the same. Continue to listen and seek to understand.
4. **Don't "whitesplain."** Do not explain racism to a POC. Do not explain how the microaggression they just experienced was actually just someone being nice. Do not explain how a particular injustice is more about class than race. It's an easy trap to fall into, but you can avoid it by maintaining a posture of active listening.
5. **Don't make the conversation about you.** The needs/feelings/questions/ priorities of white people are centered everywhere else. If you feel silenced or undervalued, use that experience to inform how you treat POC in other spaces instead of developing a victim complex. The falling of white tears does not build bridges.
6. **Don't equate impact with intent.** Yes, we all know your heart was in the right place and you meant well. But your words or behavior had a negative impact on those around you, and that's what matters. Apologize and do better next time.
7. **Don't explain away a POC's experience of oppression.** Don't play devil's advocate or provide an alternative explanation for what happened. Take their word for it. Maybe ask a follow-up question like, "How did that make you feel?"
8. **If what you are about to say starts with "Not all..." (...men, ...white people, ...evangelicals, ...police officers, etc.), don't say it.** Conversations about race and racism are about systems, institutions, and ideologies more than individuals. Of course, there are "good" examples in each of these categories. But don't derail the conversation by bringing up the exceptions, when discussing the rule.

9. **Don't demand proof of a POC's lived experience or try to counter their narrative with the experience of another POC.** The experiences and opinions of POC are as diverse as its people. We can believe their stories. But keep in mind: just because one POC doesn't feel oppressed, that doesn't mean systemic, institutional racism isn't real.
10. **Don't believe the classic trope that behavior modification on the part of POCs would eliminate racism.** In other words, don't blame the victim. POCs changing how they dress, what music they listen to, how they speak, or any other number of excuses, will not eradicate white supremacy.
11. **Do not chastise POCs (or dismiss their message) because they express their grief, fear, or anger in ways you deem "inappropriate."** Understand that historically, we white people have silenced voices of dissent and lament with our cultural idol of "niceness." Provide space for POCs to wail, cuss, or even yell at you. Jesus didn't hold back when he saw hypocrisy and oppression; POCs shouldn't have to either.
12. **Do not attempt to equate your experiences visiting, serving, or living overseas with the experience of being a POC in America.** You may have been a minority in your setting, but it is not an equivalent experience. Being a POC in America includes a different set of dynamics.
13. **Don't underestimate the impact of your words.** You have the power to inflict real, lasting damage in these conversations. Be careful; melanin is not a protective shield. Decide if you want to be a balm or a battering ram.
14. **Don't forget: racism is *our* problem.** Our people created and sustained it, and now it's our job to dismantle it. Only by the grace and mercy of God are POCs willing to walk this road with us toward racial healing and reconciliation. Honor that reality in how you treat those with whom you want to build bridges.
15. **Don't get defensive when you are called out for any of the above.** When a POC tells you that your words/tone/behavior are racist/oppressive/triggering, you stop. Don't try to explain yourself (see #6.) Don't become passive-aggressive or sarcastic. Don't leave in a huff. (It may be helpful, however, to inconspicuously step outside/go to the restroom and take a deep breath.) Remain cognizant of the dynamics of white fragility, and take note of how it usually shows up in you.
16. **Don't give up.** Stay in the race. Take care of yourself. Find community. Keep a Sabbath. Abide in the Word. Pray. Laugh. Cry. Yell. Sit quietly. Sing. Dance. Remember that our hope is in Jesus, who is present, and who sees all, and who grieves more deeply than you over racial oppression. Then come back and work hard again tomorrow.

## WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

*Whiteness 101* was created by [Be the Bridge](#) as a launching point for racial understanding. We must keep in mind that educating ourselves about the intersection of race and faith will be a continual, lifelong process. As our founder, Tasha Morrison, likes to say, "It's a marathon, not a sprint!"

Join the BTB movement as we labor toward racial justice, healing, and reconciliation in the church and in our country. Here are some suggested next steps:

1. Request to join the [Be the Bridge To Racial Unity](#) Facebook community, where bridge builders from around the country process life and race through the lens of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. Diversify your world. Visit or join a church where the leadership and the majority of the congregation are POCs. Get your news from a difference source. Shop at different stores. Follow POCs on Twitter. Move to a more diverse part of town.
3. Start a monthly book club to discuss some the suggested titles from this document with other white bridge builders.
4. If you read through *Whiteness 101* by yourself, consider going through it again, this time with a group of white friends.
5. Consider joining or launching a local [Bridge To Racial Unity Discussion Group](#). Click on the link to purchase our Bridge To Racial Unity Discussion Guide 2.0 and Leader's Guide. Assess your readiness by reading the "Questions To Ask Yourself Before Starting a BTB Group."