

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

*Allies for Change*

[www.alliesforchange.org](http://www.alliesforchange.org)

**INSTITUTIONAL POWER:** The ability or official authority to decide what is best for others. The ability to decide who will have access to resources. The institutional capacity to exercise control over others.

**PREJUDICE:** A judgment or opinion that is formed on insufficient grounds before facts are known or in disregard of facts that contradict it. Prejudices are learned and they can be unlearned.

**STEREOTYPE:** An exaggerated or distorted belief about a group that attributes characteristics to members of a particular group, simplistically lumping people together and refusing to acknowledge differences among members of the group.

**DISCRIMINATION:** A showing of partiality or prejudice in treatment; specific policies or actions directed against the welfare of a group. Racial discrimination is treating someone unfairly on the basis of race.

**OPPRESSION:** The combination of prejudice and institutional power which creates a system that discriminates against some groups (often called “target groups”) and benefits other groups (often called “dominant or nontarget groups”). Examples of these systems are racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, and ageism. These systems enable dominant groups to exert control over target groups by limiting their rights, freedom, and access to basic resources such as health care, education, employment, and housing.

**TARGETS OF OPPRESSION:** Targets of oppression are members of social identity groups that are disenfranchised, exploited, and victimized in a variety of ways by members of nontarget or dominant groups and the systems or institutions that protect the interests of nontarget groups. Targets of oppression are marginalized by the dominant (nontarget) group’s ideology and practice, which support oppression by denying that it exists and blame the conditions of oppression on actions of the targets.

**PRIVILEGE:** Privilege operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and grants advantages, favors, and benefits to members of nontarget social groups at the expense of members of target groups. For example, in the United States, privilege is granted people who have membership in one or more of these social identity groups:

- white people
- nondisabled people
- heterosexuals
- males
- Christians
- middle or owning class people
- English-speaking people.

Privilege is characteristically invisible to people who have it. People in dominant groups often believe that they have earned the privileges that they enjoy or that everyone could have access to these privileges if only they worked to earn them. In fact, privileges are unearned and they are granted people in the dominant groups whether they want those privileges or not and regardless of their stated intent. Unlike targets of oppression, people in dominant groups are frequently unaware that they are members of the dominant group due to the privilege of being able to see themselves as individuals rather than as members of a social group.

**NONTARGET GROUP MEMBERS:** Nontarget group members are members of the dominant social groups in the United States, privileged by birth or acquisition, who knowingly or unknowingly exploit and reap unfair advantage over members of groups that are targets of oppression. Nontargets are also trapped by the system of institutionalized oppression that benefits them, and are confined to roles and prescribed behaviors. In United States culture, nontargets have the power to define the norms that are prevalent in their organizations, they see themselves as “normal” or “proper,” whereas targets are likely to be labeled as “deviant,” “abnormal,” or “defective.”

**RACE and ETHNICITY:** The relationship between race and ethnicity is complex. Ethnicity can be seen as a sub-category of race. In the U.S., the broad racial categories that are often used to identify people include White (or European American), African American, Asian American, Latinx, and Native American (or American Indian). Within these racial categories are many ethnic groups or identities. For example, the category ‘Asian American’ includes ethnic groups such as Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai, etc. Within the category Latinx are many ethnic groups or identities, including Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, etc.

**RACISM** in the United States is a system in which white people maintain supremacy over people of other races through a set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and institutional power. Racism bestows privileges and unearned advantages on white people and denies people of

color full and equal access to housing, employment, health care, education, etc. A person of any race can have prejudices about people of other races, but only members of the dominant social group can exhibit racism because racism is prejudice plus the institutional power to enforce it. Racism is manifest in at least four levels of U.S. society: personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural.

**ALLIES** are people passionately committed to eliminating systems of oppression that unjustly benefit them. The word “ally” should be regarded as a verb rather than a noun because it has to do with action, showing up, and right relationship. It is not a static reality once and for all achieved. Nor is it a label that people with privilege can claim for themselves. People who are targets of oppression determine who their allies are. An ally is a person whose commitment to dismantling oppression is reflected in a willingness to do the following:

- Educate yourself about the oppression.
- Learn from and listen to people who are targets of the oppression.
- Examine and challenge your prejudices, stereotypes, and assumptions.
- Educate yourself about the unearned privileges, advantages and entitlements you have been granted.
- Be open to challenge and correction by those who are targets of oppression or by other allies.
- Work through feelings of guilt, shame, and defensiveness to understand what is beneath those feelings and what needs to be healed.
- Learn and practice the skills of challenging oppressive remarks, behaviors, policies and institutional structures.
- Act collaboratively with members of the target group to dismantle oppression.
- Cultivate a spirit of humility.
- Nurture relationships and communities of accountability with people in target groups.
- Feel your own anger, rage, and grief at the oppression.
- Bring your full self to this work.
- Stay in the struggle for justice for a lifetime.

**INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION:** The process whereby people in the target group make oppression internal and personal by coming to believe that the lies, prejudices, and stereotypes about them are true. Members of target groups exhibit internalized oppression when they alter their attitudes, behaviors, speech, and self-confidence to reflect the stereotypes and norms of the dominant group. Internalized oppression can create low self-esteem, self-doubt, and even self-

loathing. It can also be projected outward as fear, criticism, and distrust of members of one's target group.

## **CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**

The use by people in the dominant group of the artifacts, traditions, cultural creations, or rituals of people in a target group without their permission. Cultural appropriation usually involves taking these customs, traditions, objects, or rituals out of their cultural or spiritual context and using them for the personal edification or financial gain of people in the dominant group. Examples of cultural appropriation include:

- The use or purchase by white North Americans of Native American sacred objects and ceremonies such as eagle feathers, pipes, chants, dances, vision quests, and sweat lodges;
- The writings, teachings, workshops, and rituals by white people posing as indigenous people or using fictitious characters that portray the "Indian" way of life. Example: author Lynn Andrews, a white woman whose books have sold more copies than all Native authors combined.
- The use of cultural group names as names for mascots of sports teams, schools, and other institutions. Often these mascots are portrayed in images that demean Native peoples. Sacred objects are also utilized as a way of whipping up team spirit. Examples: The Cleveland Indians and the Fighting Illini of the University of Illinois. In the case of the latter, the team mascot is an "Indian chief" who wears a Native costume and headdress and does mock chants and dances during halftime.
- Removal of human remains and artifacts from burial mounds for placement in North American or European museums.

This glossary was compiled by *Allies for Change*, P.O. Box 4353, East Lansing,, MI 48826 ~ [www.alliesforchange.org](http://www.alliesforchange.org). We are indebted to these sources: cultural bridges to justice ([www.culturalbridgestojustice.org](http://www.culturalbridgestojustice.org)); The Women's Theological Center ([www.thewtc.org](http://www.thewtc.org)); The National Council for Community and Justice (<http://nccj.org>); *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism*, edited by Maurianne Adams et al; Laura I. Rendon, *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy*. October 2017.