

# White People Must Address Their Privilege

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Anything regarding race is often regarded as a controversial topic, especially the word “privilege,” as it implies one individual or group has an advantage over another.

White privilege means that whiteness is seen as the status quo. It is the responsibility of those with white privilege to recognize and utilize this privilege.

However, privilege is not the absence of all hardship or mean that one’s life is easy. Nor is it an idea exclusive to race—privilege is present in practically every aspect of society.

Those with white privilege will not face systemic racism. Systemic, or institutional, racism refers to the concept that racism is embedded and normalized in society. It is larger than the individual, and those participating are not always aware of it.

Systemic racism benefits those with racial privilege by automatically disadvantaging people of color (POC). Many white people, used to being seen as the status quo, may not notice this privilege, but it’s damaging to those excluded from it.

Racism is not a one-way street that only damages one side, the institutions of racism also serve to bolster those doing the oppressing.

Undeniably, white people do benefit from racism. White

people are three times less likely to be killed during incidents involving police as black people, according to a study by researchers from Harvard. Historical subjects taught in school disproportionately revolve

around the struggles and accomplishments of white

Americans, and often only depict POC history in context of white history.

It’s also important to recognize that other factors that may make someone disenfranchised in society do not erase or mitigate white privilege. A gay person who is white still has privilege over a gay person who is black. Though someone may experience discrimination for one part of their identity, being white will ultimately give them privilege over others with the same identity and different ethnicity.

This does not, however, defame or demonize specifically white people or any race as a whole. Someone’s racial privilege and disenfranchisement are unchangeable. No person alive will live to see the end of white privilege or racism. This may seem like a futile view, but it does not mean there is nothing people can do to try and reduce racial injustice.

In fact, the permeating nature of racism means that doing something about it is very important. The bystander effect, according to Psychology Today, “occurs when the presence of others discourages an individual from intervening.” It involves the role of those not directly involved in an incident play in preventing further harm.

This philosophy applies not only in crimes or “emergency situations” but also in instances of racial injustice, microaggressions, and other events that normalize racist behavior.

Not only are the racist words hurtful, but if the remark goes unquestioned, it maintains an environment that is a safe space for racists. Racist remarks are not always blatant or said with malice or ill-will, but can still be racism.

The responsibility of calling out these events has been placed on the shoulders of POC, the affected group, but, standing up in these

situations is often isolating or even dangerous.

The constant responsibility to be both the educator and representative of a racial group is a tiring, and constant part of life for many POC.

To learn about the effects and



roots of racism rather than experiencing it for a lifetime is a privilege afforded to white people. But though it may not negatively impact them, white people are needed in the fight for racial justice – everyone is needed.

“I think that everybody bears a responsibility to uphold the fundamental values of kindness and care. Yet the responsibilities differ because no person of color should have ever had to ask to be on equal footing,” MIHS’ principal, who is white, Walter Kelly said. “And it is upon those who have access to power to do those things, not to minimize the voice [of] or speak for people of color but to make sure that we seek racial justice, and we address [racial injustice] when we have the power to do so.”

Acknowledgment of white privilege, of everyday racism, is the first important step as a white ally. However it is not the only step, as the acknowledgment of white privilege is not enough.

Actively listening, learning, analyzing society’s and one’s own biases are all also essential. Allyship is not an easy or simple thing to do, but when everyone works together to actively call out and face the institutions of white privilege, real change can be made.

