

# Structural Racism

In this session we focus on structural racism, especially on black individuals, families and communities, of generations and generations of racial oppression. We begin with some definitions, excerpted from [Race, Power and Policy: Dismantling Structural Racism](#)

Racialization and Forms of Racism: Racialization shapes an institution so that as part of its normal functioning, and without anyone having a consciously racist intention, it produces disparities in outcome by race. A prime example of this is the way in which our criminal justice system has evolved. In general, officials avoid saying or doing things that are overtly racist. As long as the system appears to be operating 'normally,' many people do not perceive racism in the system, and many will resist any arguments that point out racial bias in criminal justice practices. And yet, racial disparities abound, in policing, in sentencing, in attitudes about the criminality of youth of color, and in profiling.

## Different forms of racism

- **Interpersonal:**  
This refers to prejudices and discriminatory behaviors where one group makes assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intents of other groups based on race. This set of prejudices leads to cruel intentional or unintentional actions towards other groups.
- **Internalized:**  
In a society in which all aspects of identity and experience are racialized, and one group is politically, socially and economically dominant, members of stigmatized groups, who are bombarded with negative messages about their own abilities and intrinsic worth, may internalize those negative messages. It holds people back from achieving their fullest potential. It also obscures the structural and systemic nature

of racial oppression, and reinforces those systems.

- Institutional:

Where assumptions about race are structured into the social and economic institutions in our society. Institutional racism occurs when organizations, businesses, or institutions like schools and police departments discriminate, either deliberately or indirectly, against certain groups of people to limit their rights. This type of racism reflects the cultural assumptions of the dominant group.

- Structural:

This refers to the accumulation over centuries of the effects of a racialized society. Think again about the creation of the white middle class and what it means today to have been left out of that process of wealth-creation, home ownership, college education, etc. Structural racism can therefore be understood as both the accumulations of racial oppression over time as well as the interactions between racialized institutions. Separate from the bias of individual actors, structural racism refers to the the embedded, entrenched patterns of a racialized society.

## Before your meeting

Please read/watch/listen to these before your meeting:

- [Structural Racism Influences](#) [pdf]. This diagram was created by members of the Spirit Rock curriculum development team as a starting point for the exploration of structural racism.
- Examples of Structural Racism
  - [Criminalizing Poverty](#) [pdf] by Bill Berkowitz

- [Is This Working?](#) *This American Life – Planting the seeds of hierarchy* (audio) Listen to the first 15 minute segment starting at 4:20.
- [House Rules](#) *This American Life – Facing contemporary housing discrimination* (audio) Listen to the first 16.5 minute segment starting at the beginning.
- Identifying and Unwinding Structural Racism
  - [The Case for Reparations](#) [pdf] by Ta-Nehisi Coates. This is a long article.

Please do these contemplations before your session 6 meeting

- Review the [diagram](#) that depicts structural racism components and interactions
  - Move through the diagram slowly, pausing between each step
  - Focus on a few of the interactions (directional arrows) and consider the stories that those interactions might tell
  - What components or interactions are missing?
  - What does this diagram reveal?
- Consider this quote from Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Two hundred fifty years of slavery. Ninety years of Jim Crow. Sixty years of separate but equal. Thirty-five years of racist housing policy. Until we reckon with our compounding moral debts, America will never be whole.” How do you feel when reading this quote? Can we be whole as individuals in the absence of or on the way to to collective wholeness?

Other Resources:

- [Brian Stevenson interview – Charlie Rose](#) Coming to terms with the legacy of slavery (video)
- [The Poor Get Prison](#) The Alarming Spread of the Criminalization of Poverty – by the International Policy Institute [pdf]
- [The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates [pdf]
- [House Rules](#) *This American Life – Facing contemporary housing discrimination* (audio) Listen to the rest of the segments.

- [Race Disability and the School-to-Prison Pipeline](#) by Julianne Hing [pdf]
- [Is Racism Over Yet?](#) [youtube video]

## Facilitation

Your group should choose a facilitator for this meeting. The facilitator role will rotate each meeting.

The facilitator's role is to guide the group through the proposed agenda. The facilitator is not expected to have any special knowledge about the topic, and responds to each question as a participant. The facilitator's role incorporates three jobs:

1. Make sure all voices are heard. We suggest "going around" to have each person speak during most sections of the agenda, rather than open discussion.
2. Keep time and keep the group moving through the agenda.
3. Ensure that a date and facilitator is set for the next meeting

## Proposed Agenda

- Sit (5 minutes)
- Review Communication Guidelines that will support your group (5 minutes)
  1. Read aloud your group's guidelines developed in the first session
  2. Discuss any revisions to the guidelines
  3. Confirm that all members can abide by the group's guidelines, or at least open to practicing with them

- Mindful Sharing (85 minutes)
    - Instruction: Mindful sharing involves each participant sharing from personal experience. There is no discussion or cross-talk during this time period, only personal sharing.
    - Each person in the group can share 3-5 minutes on each question (gauge the time depending on the number of people in your group)
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- **Discussion Questions**

1. In your review of the diagram that depicts structural racism components and influences, what did you notice? How do you see structural racism relating to but distinct from institutionalized, interpersonal, and internalized racism? Could you imagine the experiences of both dominant and subordinate groups at either end of the arrows? If so, what was that like?

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2. Were there any stories in any of the materials that caused a more intense emotional response? Were there places where you noticed yourself numbed out when reading? What spiritual practices help you stay present with difficult experiences?

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3. In your consideration of the quote from Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Two hundred fifty years of slavery. Ninety years of Jim Crow. Sixty years of separate but equal. Thirty-five years of racist housing policy. Until we reckon with our compounding moral debts, America will never be whole.” What came up for you? How do you relate to his idea of reparations and its potential for creating a new narrative of our country’s history? What thoughts and emotions come up? Which ones, if any, do you want to follow?

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4. What do you imagine as the cost to all members of society of structural racism? This session focused on structural racism targeting the black community. How

do you think structural racism plays out for other racialized communities?

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- Sit (5 minutes)
- Group Reflection (10 minutes)
  - Instruction: Group Reflection is like Mindful Sharing in that there is no discussion or cross-talk, however the focus is on what kind of experience the participants had during the meeting rather than on the content covered.
  - Each person in the group can share 2-3 minutes about what it was like to participate in the group (gauge time based on number of people in the group)
  - PROMPT: What was it like to engage in Mindful Sharing today? How has this been for you so far?
- Plan the next meeting (5 minutes)
  - How did your technology or meeting logistics work? Any changes you would like to try for the next meeting?
  - When will you meet?
  - Who will facilitate?
- If there's time left, finish with a closing sit (5 minutes)