



WHAT IS... SYSTEMIC RACISM



DEFINITION:

RACIAL BIASES, discrimination, principles, assumptions, policies (written or implied), practices, and beliefs that favor white people over Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and support unfair and inequitable treatment of BIPOC. Often, systemic racism is more difficult to perceive and address because it is so embedded and normative, “less overt, far more subtle” (1967, Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*)



EXAMPLE(S):

BEGINNING IN THE 1930'S the U.S. government “redlined” relegated Black Americans—and, in some regions of the nation, relegated other BIPOC people—to live only in certain neighborhoods for and deemed those areas “sketchy” and Black homebuyers and their properties as risky investments.

Therefore, property values in Black communities were valued much lower than in comparable white communities, so that federal and state government refused to insure mortgages in and near African-American neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the Federal Housing Authority subsidized builders and homebuyers in communities for white people and added provisos that forbade realtors from selling those homes to African Americans. Because homeownership was and still is a primary path to personal and generational wealth, this systemic racism rendered whole communities of African Americans without a fundamental pathway to wealth.

These decades' old practices have long-term effects that still impact Black people, families, and communities to the present day. Redlining gave white homeowners the opportunity to move upward financially because their houses increased in value, while it held back Black owners because their houses did not increase in value.

Another example: A large, wealthy white church in a mostly white Christian denomination needs a new pastor and the church has always had white pastors. When a white bishop and mostly white Cabinet consider the best candidates for the appointment, they only consider white pastors. Black, Indigenous and People of Color are not even in the pool for serious consideration.



FRAMING OR REFERENCES:

BIBLICAL/SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMING OR REFERENCES:

Numbers 27: The father of daughters died and because they were female, they were not going to inherit the assets - only males could inherit. The daughters felt the inheritance system was unjust and went to the leaders to get their share of the inheritance. Moses brought the case before the Lord who did not disregard it outright. Moses listened to what God told him - even though it was unpopular and went against the system of the time.

Those who hold power are the people who can and should do the most to make the changes to systems that privilege them over others. Those who are victims of the system can share how they have experienced the system but cannot make changes alone.



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REFLECTION:

QUESTION #1

In the story (Numbers 27), think of a time when you were:

- the daughter who spoke passionately about being treated unjustly within a system,
- other sisters who supported the cause and were there to stand with the sister while making the case to the leaders,
- Moses who had the power to change a system to help the daughters.

1

QUESTION #2

Picture the following roles, what racial group/gender/class come to mind?

- CEO of a Fortune 500 company (86% are white men)
- U.S. governor of a state (94% are white)
- U.S. airline pilot (92% white)
- Lawyers and judges (89% white)

2

QUESTION #3

Why do you think you picture the race/ethnicity of the person you do? Which systems (i.e., education, political, professional, legal, etc.) might hinder BIPOC persons from holding these roles?

3

QUESTION #4

Think of a time when you were meeting someone for the first time, and they were not the race/ethnicity you assumed they would be. What factors lead to that assumption? What systemic biases affected your preconceived ideas? What do you say to yourself? And did that experience change your thinking about the future?

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

WHAT IS SYSTEMIC RACISM IN AMERICA? (FROM YOUTUBE)

[youtube.com/
watch?v=AjQBgBcbOyQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=AjQBgBcbOyQ)

WHAT IS SYSTEMIC RACISM? (VIDEO PLAYLIST FROM RACE FORWARD)

[youtube.com/@racialjustice/
playlists](https://youtube.com/@racialjustice/playlists)

4 STRATEGIES TO ELIMINATE THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF SYSTEMIC RACISM (REPORT FROM COLORLINES)

[colorlines.com/article/report-
4-strategies-eliminate-harmful-
effects-systemic-racism/](https://colorlines.com/article/report-4-strategies-eliminate-harmful-effects-systemic-racism/)