

## **SOME COSTS OF 'WHITENESS'**

It has become well established in teachings and literature since the 1980s that a fundamental reality underlying and resulting from racism in America is the special power and privileges that it grants to people who are identified as white. This condition is mirrored by the immense limitations and destruction imposed by the racist system on people not defined as white (predominantly those with African, Asian, Indigenous American and/or Latino/a ancestry).

As we entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it had also become well-established that the very concept of “race,” as understood in the West, is a product of social, educational, economic and political manipulation. The scientific validity claimed for it in the past three centuries has been acknowledged as false.

The terms commonly used to classify people by the U.S. Government and many other institutions are products of this myth-making system. The pseudo-scientific names (especially, Caucasian) and colors (especially, “white”) associated with these identity classifications are false. History reveals that they were chosen by power elites in Europe and the USA to capitalize on metaphoric differentials in the color definitions that claimed value ascending from darkest to lightest.

People classified as “white” commonly are actually mixed lighter shades of the primary colors of red, yellow and brown. Their benefits from the white supremacist cultural dominance, however, impedes changing understanding.

It is seldom acknowledged, openly, that “white” power and privilege come with distinct costs to everyone benefiting from them. Acknowledging these costs should be helpful in motivating change. Following are some examples applicable to all well-intentioned “white” people, including the many who mistakenly aspire to “color-blindness.”

- 1. We are inherently seen as ‘the oppressor’ by people not ‘white.’**
- 2. Authentic inter-racial relationships are hard to build**
- 3. Prejudices, stereotypes and scapegoating of people who are not ‘white’ enter our minds against our will**
- 4. We’re trapped into denial by relationships with other ‘whites’ who refuse to talk about race**

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- 5. We're drawn into conversations & media portrayals that assume 'whiteness' as normative and/or superior**
- 6. It's hard to find housing in a moderately priced mixed-race neighborhood**
- 7. It's often hard to find healthy portrayals of diversity in education or entertainment for children**
- 8. Our children are denied accurate interpretations of American history and heroic figures**
- 9. We are burdened with fear that what we have is unearned and subject to loss if 'white' people become a racial minority**
- 10. We are led to believe that most poor people in the USA are not 'white' – contrary to statistical reality.**
- 11. We pay an excessive tax burden for criminal justice, for building and operating prisons and for emergency health care services, in preference to assuring quality education, health care and job development that would equitably serve families who are not 'white' and are confined by social and economic practices to predominantly segregated, low-income communities.**
- 12. We know, and are reminded when looking in a mirror, that we are living a lie, for we are not really white.**
- 13. We are haunted by the fear of being considered 'racist.'**

The psychological, spiritual, social and economic costs of this system to “white” people are immense, but predominantly ignored or denied. Some, of course – especially those most profoundly empowered or enriched by the historic system – could see their profit more than offsetting the costs. Most “white” people, however, are misled into ignoring the price they’re paying. Consciousness-raising is a fundamental step toward change.

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