

Racism and White Privilege

QUADRANT 3

Name of Activity: Construction of White Privilege, Option B: History of Racism Timeline

Purpose: This activity is intended to go over the patterns in U.S. history to illustrate the systematic and enduring features of racism, and to highlight historical moments when racism was challenged or altered by collective human action. Since many people do not know this history, they are likely to assume that the United States has made steady progress in eliminating racism and that racism is a problem of individual bigotry or discrimination. Knowledge of this history can help participants understand the basis for contemporary racial problems, and makes it possible to imagine solutions that address these underlying problems.

Learning Outcomes:

- Identify and analyze the material consequences of racial construction for people defined as people of color
- Describe the cultural and institutional privileges/advantages attached to “whiteness” in the U.S.

Time Needed: 45–60 minutes

Materials Needed: “Key Events in the Struggle for Racial Equality in the United States” timeline; lecture notes or PowerPoint; historical cards or sheets of paper with dates on some/events on others

Degree of Risk: Medium-risk

Procedure: Review the key points in the history of racism and the experiences of different racial groups in the United States using the timeline handout provided. Make sure to discuss how the events on the timeline perpetuate white norms and white normativity. The timeline we provide is fairly extensive, and it is not likely you will have time to go over every item listed. Be selective and encourage the participants to note and follow up on other events that interest them. You can also assign this as homework.

You may use any of the following approaches to review the information included on the timeline:

- **Format 1:** Ahead of time, put historical events on cards or sheets of paper and the dates on another set of cards or sheet of paper. Give some participants the sheets with dates printed on them, and give other participants the sheets on which the events are printed. Then ask the participants to work together to match dates and events. The participants holding the sheets with dates should have several people clustered around them at the end of the activity.

- **Format 2:** Post dates in sequence around the room. Give the participants cards that have descriptions of the events, and ask them to tape their cards on the posters (stand in the space) with the appropriate date.
- **Format 3:** In advance, construct a racism history quiz. Have the participants complete the quiz on their own, then discuss the answers to the quiz. The participants can score their quiz, grade themselves, and discuss how much or little they knew about the history of racism and why.
- **Format 4:** Construct in advance a racism history “Jeopardy” game, using the format of the Jeopardy television game show.
- **Format 5:** Present a brief lecture based on materials noted above. Post the timeline on newspaper paper or as a PowerPoint presentation so that it is visible to all the participants. Also provide a copy of the “Key Events in the Struggle for Racial Equality in the United States” timeline for each participant. Ask the participants to follow the lecture by making notes on the timeline as you go.

Processing: After the participants have completed examining key points in the history of racism through one of the formats above, segue into a large-group discussion using the following questions:

1. What is one thing that you learned in this activity?
2. What surprised you about this activity?
3. What do you want to find out more about as a result of this activity?
4. What events described in this activity did you learn about in school?
5. What events described in this activity did you not learn about in school? Why do you think that is?

Facilitation Notes: While the activity focuses on illustrating the systematic and enduring features of racism that are a part of the nation’s history, facilitators can add another layer to this activity by reviewing the timeline with the participants from an intersectional standpoint. For example, when focused on discussing the manifestation of racism in a particular historical period, facilitators can make visible the differences in which men and women of color might have experienced racism on account of the intersections between their race and gender. This can also help the participants better understand the discourse around race and gender oppression at a particular period in American history, creating a stronger basis for understanding contemporary manifestations of racism as well as other forms of oppression.

Recommended Reading (Participants): None

Recommended Reading (Facilitators): None

Credits: Khyati Joshi, Marjorie Valdiva