

## Creating Common Language: Working Glossary for Advancing Equity in Nebraska

*The first step towards advancing racial equity is to make sure everyone has a common foundation of language and definitions as they relate to larger behaviors and framework. To get us started in most cases, definitions are used in whole or in part from Aspen Institutes' Roundtables on Community Change<sup>1</sup> unless otherwise noted.*

**Racialization<sup>2</sup>:** Racialization is the process by which racial understandings are formed, re-formed and assigned to groups of people and to social institutions and practices, and to the consequences of such understandings. The effects of racialization accumulate over time. Some of the effects are altered, at times sharply, as in the case of the passage of civil rights legislation, but they are not erased. Examples from history help us make the process of racialization more visible and concrete. As we move through history, from the colonial era through today, we can highlight how institutional policies, interactions among institutions, and differences in resources or investment over time, produce and reproduce racially inequitable outcomes. Taken together, these histories provide a picture of the cumulative effects of racialization, and how we have inherited these effects in the form of structural racism.

**Structural Racism:** A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, assimilated behaviors and thoughts, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems within which we all exist.

**Racial Equity:** Racial equity would be a reality through change in systems in which a person is no more or less likely to experience society's benefits or burdens just because of the color of their skin. This is in contrast to the current state of affairs in which a person of color is more likely to live in poverty, be imprisoned, drop out of high school, be unemployed and experience poor health outcomes like diabetes, heart disease, depression and other potentially fatal diseases. Racial equity holds society to a higher standard. It demands that we pay attention not just to individual-level discrimination, but to overall social outcomes. Racial equity uses systems thinking. Individuals are not viewed as “bad actors” but as an interconnected system that involves everyone. We all play a part in what is occurring, and we can all help to change it.

**White Privilege:** White privilege, or “historically accumulated white privilege,” as we have come to call it, refers to whites' historical and contemporary advantages in access to quality education, decent jobs and liveable wages, homeownership, retirement benefits, wealth and so on. Peggy McIntosh sums it up, “White privilege is an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in every day, but about which I was meant to remain oblivious.”<sup>3</sup>

**Institutional Racism:** Institutional racism refers to the policies and practices within and across institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favor, or put a racial group at a disadvantage. Poignant examples of institutional racism can be found in school disciplinary policies in which students of color are punished at much higher rates than their white counterparts, in the criminal justice system, and within many employment sectors in which day-to-day operations, as well as hiring and firing practices can significantly disadvantage workers of color.

**Individual Racism:** Individual racism can include face-to-face or covert actions toward a person that intentionally express prejudice, hate or bias based on race.

**Diversity:** Diversity has come to refer to the various backgrounds and races that comprise a community, nation or other grouping. In many cases the term diversity does not just acknowledge the existence of diversity of background, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation and so on, but implies an appreciation of these differences.

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<sup>1</sup> “Glossary for Understanding the Dismantling Structural Racism/Promoting Racial Equity Analysis” at <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/rcc/RCC-Structural-Racism-Glossary.pdf> retrieved on 11/17/2014

<sup>2</sup> “Race, Power and Policy: Dismantling Structural Racism” at [http://www.strategicpractice.org/system/files/race\\_power\\_policy\\_workbook.pdf](http://www.strategicpractice.org/system/files/race_power_policy_workbook.pdf) retrieved on 6/30/2014

<sup>3</sup> “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” By Peggy McIntosh excerpted from Working Paper #189 White Privilege and Male Privilege a Personal Account.... Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College Center for the Study of Women (1989).

**Inclusion:** One of the aims of inclusion is ensuring that people of color are “at the table” and included in some appropriate proportion or that their perspectives are taken into account to ensure coverage. This approach can easily come off as “tokenism” without voice AND role AND action that leads to racially equitable outcomes. “Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power is important.”<sup>4</sup> It can be a powerful means to racial equity as an end. It—in and of itself—does not result in equity in outcomes.

**Ethnicity:** Ethnicity refers to the social characteristics that people may have in common, such as language, religion, regional background, culture, foods, etc. Ethnicity is revealed by the traditions one follows, a person’s native language, and so on. Race, on the other hand, describes categories assigned to demographic groups based mostly on observable physical characteristics, like skin color, hair texture and eye shape.

**Cultural Representations:** Cultural representations refer to popular stereotypes, images, frames and narratives that are socialized and reinforced by media, language and other forms of mass communication and “common sense.” Cultural representations can be positive or negative, but from the perspective of the dismantling structural racism analysis, too often cultural representations depict people of color in ways that are dehumanizing, perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes, and have the overall effect of allowing unfair treatment within the society as a whole to seem fair, or ‘natural.’

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<sup>4</sup> “The Dynamic System of Power, Privilege, and Oppression” at <http://www.opensourceleadership.com/documents/DO%20Definitions.pdf> retrieved on 11/17/2014