

APA RESOLUTION on Harnessing Psychology to Combat Racism: Adopting a Uniform Definition and Understanding

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WHEREAS racism has been an enduring, insidious, and pervasive feature of the United States (U.S.) landscape that often operates outside of the conscious awareness of its targets, perpetrators, and beneficiaries, and has had an incalculable, negative toll on the basic human rights to survival, security, health, well-being, and societal participation of generations of people in the U.S. and across the globe (Alvarez et al., 2016; APA, 2012; 2019);

WHEREAS the belief that people of color were inferior was used to justify Indigenous peoples' forced removal and genocide and the enslavement of Africans, thereby establishing racism and settler colonialism and violence at the root of the ascendant U.S. and legitimizing racial and economic inequality;

WHEREAS racism was constructed as a basis to create and sustain White supremacy by assigning value to people of European descent and disproportionately allocating societal resources and opportunities to them, while limiting or refusing access to opportunity among Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), thereby severely marginalizing their status and blunting the potential of the entire society (C.P. Jones, 2018; Mosley et al., 2021);

WHEREAS positionality refers to one's own position or place in relation to race, ethnicity, and other statuses and how our identities relate to the systems of privilege and oppression that shape our psychological experiences, relationships, and access to resources (APA, 2019);

WHEREAS White privilege is unearned power that is afforded to White people on the basis of status rather than earned merit and protects White people from the consequences of being racist and benefitting from systemic racism; such power may come in the form of rights, benefits, social comforts, opportunities, or the ability to define what is normative or valued (APA, 2019; Neville et al., 2013);

WHEREAS White supremacy—the ideological belief that biological and cultural Whiteness is superior, as well as normal and healthy—is a pervasive ideology that continues to polarize our nation and undergird racism (Helms, 2017; Liu et al., 2017; Liu, 2019);

WHEREAS racism is not only limited to racist ideas, attributions, expectations, assumptions, and behaviors held by individuals but also has shaped and undermined almost every aspect of U.S. society, including our laws, policies, educational systems, customs, and cultural narratives, weakening our political and civic institutions and creating many political and social fissures (Anderson, 2016; Helms, 2017, 2020; Liu et al., 2019);

WHEREAS in the current anti-immigrant climate, xenophobia and discrimination adversely impact the lives of Latino/a/x people (APA, 2012), and policies and programs that exclude, segregate, separate, detain, and physically remove immigrants from the U.S. reproduce racial inequalities in other areas of social life through spillover effects that result in significant negative consequences for immigrants and their families (Aranda & Vaquera, 2015).

WHEREAS hate crimes against Asian Americans have increased dramatically in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, spurred by the current social and political climate in which COVID-19 has been labeled as the "China virus" or "Chinese virus" (Zhang et al., 2021);

WHEREAS racism intersects with other social and personal identities (e.g., age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability status, socioeconomic status, etc.) in ways that compound experiences of oppression among diverse groups in the form of sexism, heterosexism, ableism (Deschamps & DeVos, 1998; Gee & Ford, 2011; Helms 2015; Liu et al., 2017);

WHEREAS cultural racism is the individual and institutional expression of the superiority of one's racial and cultural heritage over another (e.g., designing a curriculum that overwhelmingly features the accomplishments of people deemed "superior;" APA, 2019, citing J.M. Jones, 1979);

WHEREAS to overcome and eliminate the pervasive harms of racism, it is essential to directly confront oppression using a culturally-centered and strengths-based approach to achieve psychological liberation, promote empowerment, and influence social reality through cultural and humanistic change (Akbar, 1984);

WHEREAS, the field of psychology has historically contributed to the belief in human hierarchy through allowing—or not challenging—racial bias throughout the discipline and profession, such as in peer review, publishing, research motivated by racism, racial disparities in psychological research, and the valuation of certain types of research), as well as in Eurocentric models of clinical practice, including psychological assessment, while largely ignoring the contributions of, and adversities facing, BIPOC (APA, 2019; Roberts et al., 2020);

WHEREAS some prominent psychologists historically have perpetuated and others continue to perpetuate racism through pseudoscientific theories that postulate racial differences in intelligence, propensity to violence, limits on educability, and other psychological characteristics, thereby contributing to eugenics and other racist movements in the United States and abroad (Editorial Board, *Personality & Individual Differences*, 2012; Guthrie, 2004; Helms, 2012);

WHEREAS the American Psychological Association (APA) has adopted several resolutions and guidelines over the past two decades acknowledging and denouncing the societal damage caused by racism (APA Resolution on Racism and Racial Discrimination: A Policy Statement in Support of the Goals of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance [2001], <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/chapter-4#2001-world-conference>; APA Resolution on Racial/Ethnic Profiling and Other Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Law and Security Enforcement Activities [2001] <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/racial-profiling>; APA's Race and Ethnicity Guidelines [2019] <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/summary-guidelines-race-ethnicity>);

WHEREAS to eradicate racism, we must understand what it is, how it operates, and who it benefits and harms, with the knowledge that many White people who do not personally harbor racial animus nonetheless benefit from racism (C.P. Jones, 2018);

WHEREAS psychology as a discipline, and other related scientific societies, lack a commonly agreed-upon definition of racism and an understanding of the many ways in which racism operates in society;

WHEREAS such a definition and understanding of racism's manifestations are necessary to advance antiracist research and develop effective prevention and intervention strategies;

WHEREAS the field of psychology has traditionally focused on intrapersonal and interpersonal racism, rather than forms of systemic racism (defined below) and the impact of historical racism on racial inequities and racial injustice (Trawalter et al., 2020);

WHEREAS this relatively narrow focus limits psychology's effectiveness in mitigating and ultimately eradicating racism, because it fails to fully address the many manifestations of racism in our institutions, systems, policies, and practices;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that APA reaffirms its denunciation of racism in all forms for its destructive psychological, social, educational, and economic effects on human rights and human welfare throughout the lifespan;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that APA will undertake an analysis of psychology's history, with the goal of understanding the harms that marginalized racial groups have experienced and the actions necessary to create a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive association, discipline, and society going forward;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that APA adopts the following definition of racism as an ideology to establish a common understanding for psychologists and other disciplines to inform and guide efforts to examine and eradicate racism:

- Racism is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on phenotypic properties (e.g., skin color and hair texture associated with "race" in the U.S.). This "system"—which ranges from daily interpersonal interactions shaped by race to racialized opportunities for good education, housing, employment, etc.—unfairly disadvantages people belonging to marginalized racial groups and damages their health and mental health, unfairly advantages individuals belonging to socially and politically dominant racial groups, and "ultimately undermines the full potential of the whole society" (C.P. Jones, 2003).

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that psychologists should consider the following four levels of racism in designing and implementing antiracist research, education, training, policy, and clinical applications through the lens of intersectionality (APA, 2019; J.M. Jones, 1979; Smedley, 2019; Yearby et al., 2020):

- Structural racism results from laws, policies, and practices that produce cumulative, durable, and race-based inequalities, and includes the failure to correct previous laws and practices that were explicitly racist (Yearby et al., 2020).
- Institutional racism results from policies, practices, and procedures of institutions—such as school, health care, law enforcement, and criminal justice systems—that marginalize diverse racial groups (APA Multicultural Guidelines, 2019; Kovera, 2019; Yearby et al., 2020).
- Interpersonal racism occurs when individuals from socially and politically dominant racial groups behave in ways that diminish and harm people who belong to other

racial groups. Interpersonal racism is therefore distinct from bigotry (negative attitudes about an outgroup, not necessarily tied to race) or prejudice (a preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience; APA, 2019; Yearby et al., 2020).

- Internalized racism refers to the acceptance by diverse racial populations of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves—including negative stereotypes and beliefs about complexion and color (i.e., colorism) that reinforce the superiority of Whites and can lead to the perception of themselves as devalued, worthless, and powerless (C.P. Jones, 2001). For example, following centuries of European colonization and/or domination, Black and Indigenous people, as well as Latino/a/x and Asian persons, may act out biased attitudes and behaviors, whereby lighter-skinned individuals of these groups assume the psychological demeanor of the dominant White group (Hall, 2002);

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that because these forms of racism are mutually reinforcing, efforts to mitigate and ultimately eradicate racism will require comprehensive interventions aimed at all of its four levels—structural, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized racism;

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that APA will promote comprehensive strategies to address racism operating at multiple levels in its practice, education, training, research, publications, policies, and advocacy, as well as actively engage with other global entities to promote and defend human rights worldwide;

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that since racism intersects and is intertwined with other systems of oppression (e.g., classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism), APA will strengthen its antiracism practices and policies to call for an active dismantling of these other systems of oppression as well;

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that while BIPOC and their communities possess and display tremendous strength and resilience in the face of racism as described above, APA will continue to advocate for increased funding for culturally-competent research to promote resilience and protective factors, as well as for expanded culturally-informed, accessible, and affordable services to enhance well-being in communities of color;

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that APA will call upon all psychologists to eliminate processes and procedures that perpetuate racial injustice in research, practice, education, and training; speak out against racism; take proactive steps to prevent the occurrence of intolerant or racist acts; and promote effective strategies based on psychological research to alleviate racial injustice;

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that APA will strengthen its antiracism policies by developing specific resolutions and accompanying materials regarding how the field of psychology can help to mitigate and eradicate racism in such areas as health care, education, and criminal justice, as well as increase work and economic opportunities.

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