



ORGANIZATIONS  
IN SOLIDARITY



March 2022

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## Confronting Racism and White Supremacy Working Group

*Recognizing, Understanding, and Defining  
Systemic and Individual White Supremacy  
Executive Summary*



WCAPS

WOMEN OF COLOR ADVANCING PEACE,  
SECURITY, AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION



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# Recognizing, Understanding, and Defining Systemic and Individual White Supremacy

## Executive Summary

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March 2022

## **Introduction:**

There are various definitions for white supremacy. The dictionary definition is, “the belief that the white race is inherently superior to other races and that white people should have control over people of other races. Further, it is defined as the social, economic, and political systems that collectively enable white people to maintain power over people of other races.”<sup>1</sup> While this is an exact descriptor of the concept of white supremacy it does not embody all aspects of the issue, and thus may give people an incomplete understanding of it, and render them unable to accurately identify white supremacy and the actions that often accompany it.

Even in previously conducted research and literature about white supremacy, white supremacists, and their actions very rarely is a definition given for white supremacy nor is a concrete definition for what a white supremacist is.<sup>2</sup> Historical and present-day analysis of white supremacy and the actions that result will prove that the best way to define white supremacy is one that addresses the differences between the ideology of white supremacy, the actions of white supremacists, and provides inclusion of more subtle instances of white supremacy.

The definition we propose is the following: White supremacy is a social and systemic manifestation of the belief that white people hold a level of superiority over other races, thus granting them the right to exert dominion over people of other racial groups, by use of both social and systemic structures. This may result in the perpetuation of this ideology, by use of violence, passive, or covert acts with these exertions being exhibited exclusively or in unison with other such actions.

The goal of this paper is to examine white supremacy through a lens that aims to better define it systemically and individually. Each section of this paper explores the diverse social and policy implications that influence the creation and sustenance of white supremacy in human culture, systems, and social settings.

## **Key Findings:**

In developing a more accurate and inclusive definition for white supremacy there were several factors that were evaluated, resulting in key findings that support the need for this change.

## **Historical Impact**

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). White supremacy. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved October 16, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/white%20supremacy>

<sup>2</sup> For further information about White Supremacy please see the resource section.

The research conducted found that the ideology of present day white supremacy is directly rooted in historic practices utilized around the world to maintain power based on race. This has likely contributed to the the vagueness surrounding the concept of white supremacy and white supremacist culture, which has in turn made it difficult for those fighting against both systemic and individual white supremacy to succeed in dismantling one or the other. In order to truly analyze white supremacist systems and individuals, the research first, needed to analyze the sub-issues and theories that influence discussions of behaviors that have plagued people of color historically and in the present day.

A widely known historical factor used to justify white supremacy is scientific racism. Scientific racism is the belief that scientific evidence justifies racism in an attempt to rationalize social and economic domination of people of color. This belief has died and resurfaced many times in multiple forms through history, but in every incarnation it contributes to racist and white supremacist beliefs. Scientific racism was utilized by leaders such as Thomas Jefferson, who justified slavery and racism by use of psuedo-science, thus creating a longstanding impact on the lives of people of color in America. Directly connected to scientific racism and its later incarnation social darwinism, is Eugenics, which Adolof Hitler utilized to justify the genocide of the Jewish population during the Holocaust.

Historical practices rooted in white supremacy have built the western world, through invasion and colonization, leaving a wake of people disenfranchised and countries under resourced.

### **Analysis of Present Day Results of Systemic and Individual or Group Based White Supremacy**

The analysis of present day white supremacy begins by looking through the lense of the systems which perpetuate and benefit from white supremacy.

Systemic white supremacy has been presented, and currently does present itself in a number of ways. In the United States, it has been hisitorically ingrained in society through policing and prisons and reared its ugly head following the 9/11 terrorists attack, causing Arabs, Muslims, and any one who may appear to belong to either of those groups to become targets of hate crimes and the loss of rights through policy based systemic racism.<sup>3</sup> In France, where it has been historically known as the color blind model of public policy, 2020 brought anti-muslim discriminatory laws designed to reuglate how Islam as a religion is practiced in France.

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<sup>3</sup> Systemic racism is racism that exists across a society within and between institutions and organizations.<sup>#</sup> Examples of systemic racism can be found in housing discrimination, government surveillance, social segregation, racial profiling, access to healthcare, and hiring or promotion practices.

Even outside of the European dominated world, systemic racism leaves a legacy due to colonization, lingering white supremacy based policies, and eurocentric social norms such as colorism.

While systemic white supremacy and the white supremacy of individual persons are different issues they are intrinsically linked. Discussing them together shines a light on the influence of systems on individual and group based white supremacy.

As the name would suggest, individual white supremacy is limited to individual people. However, many belong to groups and may be inspired by systems that cater to white supremacist ideologies and actions. A very well known example group based white supremacy is the Klu Klux Klan, who benefited from systemic white supremacy for years as they terrorized people of color and continue to lend as an inspiration to many individual white supremacists who impact the world by use of violence.

Individual white supremacy can show up in more covert forms like work place discrimination, as well, with this being detrimental to people of color as they attempt to advance their careers.

### **Long standing impact of white supremacy: Security and Barriers to Development**

A combination of systemic, group and individual white supremacy, coupled with the historical impacts of white supremacy have created an environment of national and worldwide insecurity. White supremacists can more easily access other countries due to the lack of scrutiny of their actions. Even in spaces where people of color maintain the majority of the population, remnants of white supremacy have created barriers to continued development due to the stripping of resources and constant colonization.

### **Conclusion:**

The fight against white supremacy is difficult when people do not have a full grasp of the historical and present-day aspects of white supremacy. White supremacy shows itself in many forms, whether it be systemic or individually and group-based. In order for white supremacy to even begin to be eradicated or addressed, there must be an accurate definition that differentiates the actions of white supremacists from white supremacist ideology.

**It is recommended that a more detailed definition, which reflects the historic and present-day impacts of white supremacy be adopted. The suggested definition is:** White supremacy is a social and systemic manifestation of the belief that white people hold a level of superiority over other races, thus granting them the right to exert dominion over people of other racial groups, by use of both social and systemic structures. This may result in the perpetuation

of this ideology, by use of violence, passive, or covert acts with these exertions being exhibited exclusively or in unison with other such actions.

While this recommended definition will help recognize the white supremacy that is built and engrained within many societies, it is imperative that systems better protect people of color and the fabric of nations by using it to create policies and that address the inequities and violence created by white supremacy along with recognizing radical individual behavior and how nations play a part in its development.



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