

Diversity and Inclusion in Our Unions

Backgrounder: White Privilege

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

The office of the National Union of Public and General Employees is situated on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

We recognize and acknowledge the crimes that have been committed and the harm that has been done.

And, we dedicate ourselves, as a union, to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous Peoples in a spirit of reconciliation and striving for justice.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

Backgrounder: White Privilege

What is privilege?

At its core, privilege is a special right or advantage that a particular person has, or a group of people have.¹ Privilege exists in many different forms. It can be based on economic status, skin colour, language, gender, sexuality, ability, neurological status, and citizenship status, etc. When we talk about privilege, it's important to look at things through an intersectional lens. People can experience different types of privilege simultaneously, be disadvantaged by multiple privileges at the same time, or experience a combination of privileges and disadvantages. In the case of North America and race, white privilege is dominant. Writer Damon Young defines white privilege this way: "For white people, [it] is that their whiteness hasn't been a social, political, professional, financial or legal hindrance. They have the privilege of the benefit of the doubt, which manifests as the privilege to just be."²

What privilege isn't

Being privileged doesn't mean your life is perfect. Having white privilege doesn't automatically mean you are financially advantaged, nor does it mean that white people don't work hard or that they're bad people. It just means you won't face the same barriers as your BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour) peers face based on the colour of their skin.

Benefiting from white privilege starts as soon as a white person is born and will impact their entire life. Recognizing white privilege is not an attack on white people. It's not useful for white people to sit in guilt. White people didn't ask for white privilege. But they can use it in service to weaken the system of white privilege.³ White people can and do use their privilege to work towards ending systematic racism and other forms of racial discrimination and oppression.

Examples of white privilege

In general, in North America, white privilege includes the below:

- You can pick from any box of "flesh tone" bandages and have the bandage mostly match your skin tone.
- Your resume doesn't get passed over due to your name.
- You'll never be asked "Where are you from?" due to the colour of your skin.
- You don't get followed in stores because people don't assume you're going to shoplift based on your skin colour.
- You don't have to question whether wearing a hooded sweatshirt for a walk around your neighbourhood might get you shot.
- You can shelter your children from conversations about racism until you think they're old enough.
- You don't get asked to speak as a representative for your whole race.

- You never have to wonder whether you got hired to fill a racial quota, nor will your co-workers ever create a hostile work environment because they think you were hired to fill a racial quota.
- You can travel internationally without worrying about getting randomly searched because of your race.
- You don't have to worry about being shot by the police during a routine traffic stop.

Some of these examples may seem trivial and others may seem extreme, but something that's trivial to one person can wear down or seriously affect another person on the receiving end. Some are more likely to happen to specific racial groups than others. But they're all things that BIPOC experience in their everyday lives.

As a union, we don't talk about white privilege to guilt or shame our white members. We're talking about it because it's necessary to advance the conversation about racism. The first step to solving any problem is to not hide from it. And the first step to any form of action is awareness.⁴

There isn't a one-size-fits-all explanation of white privilege that will make sense to all people. Below is a selection of materials to help you on your journey of understanding white privilege and how white people can use it to help dismantle power structures with roots in white supremacy.

Resources for furthering your understanding of white privilege

[Why do so many white people deny the existence of white privilege?](#)

[My White Friend Asked Me on Facebook to Explain White Privilege. I Decided to Be Honest.](#)

[Privilege & Allyship](#)

[The intersectionality wars](#)

[Jane Elliott on Her "Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes Exercise" and Fighting Racism](#)

[Eye of the Storm](#)

["White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" and "Some Notes for Facilitators"](#)

[White Privilege](#)

[White People \(documentary film\)](#)

¹ https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/privilege_1?q=privilege

² <https://www.theroot.com/antwon-rose-jr-and-when-white-privilege-kills-black-pe-1827137476>

³ https://www.ted.com/talks/peggy_mcintosh_how_to_recognize_your_white_privilege_and_use_it_to_fight_inequality?language=en

⁴ https://www.ted.com/talks/mellody_hobson_color_blind_or_color_brave/transcript



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- B. C. General Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

■ 15 AURIGA DRIVE
NEPEAN, ONTARIO
CANADA / K2E 1B7

■ [613] 228-9800
FAX [613] 228-9801

■ www.nupge.ca

■ national@nupge.ca

