

**Introductory Texts to Black Radical  
Knowledge**

**Volume I**

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THE BLACK KNOWLEDGE



COALITION

## **Abolition as Praxis of Human Being: A Forward**

Rodriguez, Dylan. 2019. "Abolition as Praxis of Human Being: A Foreword." *Harvard Law Review* 132, no. 6 (April): 1575-1612.

### **Definitions**

Abolition: An ideology which believes in the total removal of violent and oppressive institutions.

Carceral state: Institutions, both domestic and international, that use state power to exert violence on or captivate oppressed peoples.

Carceral power: The scope of the carceral state.

Collective genius: Group efforts, both intellectual and imaginative, that go toward building the ideal society.

### **Summary**

Abolition cannot exist without imagination. Because a society free of the carceral state has not existed, being an abolitionist requires believing in the collective genius of the community. It is rethinking justice. The carceral state and incarceration cannot be limited to the physical ways it manifests (jails, detention centers, police, etc.). Incarceration makes one group asserting dominance and control over another normal and necessary. Abolition believes in the complete upheaval and removal of these systems and a reimagined justice.

### **Key Takeaways**

#### Abolition is imagination

Believing abolition is believing in the possibility of a world that does not yet exist. It is a communal dream toward a future different from the societies that have existed to this point. This can be accomplished by *collective genius*.

A key part of abolitionist thinking freeing ourselves of the traditional demands for policy reform, formal equality, and increased electoral participation. *The goal is for a society where these demands are not needed to begin with.*

#### Redefining what justice means

Abolition necessitates redefining what it means to find justice; *one that does not involve the carceral state or carceral power*. We have been conditioned to associate justice with punishment; that is not the only way. *Restorative justice*, for example, focuses on the harm done by the offender instead of punishment.

#### Reform will not work

Reform treats issues as police brutality and mass incarcerations as symptoms of the institution rather than tools. It overlooks components like normalized misery, social surveillance, and state terror by focusing on “phenomenon”. Reform concedes that the carceral state is simply a part of society.

The 13th Amendment is the perfect example of failed reform. It simply redressed a race-based power structure by redefining what justifies human capture. Reform has been trying to happen since the transatlantic slave trade and Manifest Destiny. Abolition is the only way.

### Abandoning the term “mass incarceration”

Mass incarceration suggests that there is only one “mass” targeted by the carceral state. It implies that this group is not the intended demographic, and they happen to be victims. When, in fact, the entire carceral state has always depended on the criminalization and gendered violence for Black, indigenous, queer, poor, and colonized peoples.

The term believes that the law and tools of law enforcement have been magically manipulated to oppress marginalized groups. The naming of mass incarceration comes from a place of privilege and shock of the “phenomenon” of mass incarceration; it’s a catch phrase. The same can be said for the term “police brutality”, which makes occasions of state sanctioned violence against Black people seem incidental.

### The carceral state normalizes captivity

Carceral institutions *naturalize* state captivity of criminalized people. It suggests that when uncriminalized people (white, cisgendered, straight, males) are incarcerated it is unjust, wrong, scandalous, and therefore *unnatural*. Therefore, they are in captivity, or incarcerated, for shorter periods of time compared to marginalized groups for whom criminalization is deemed *natural*. The carceral state assumes that because someone may be Black, Latino, queer, alternately abled, poor, or uneducated, it is natural for them to be incarcerated.

### Incarceration is more than physical structures

In order to understand abolition, one must understand that incarceration is not an isolated occurrence, and it is not limited to the physical places where it may take place. Incarceration is a means to enforce control in any capacity. It creates the normalized dominance over certain people’s existence and environment.

Incarceration is apartheid, military occupation, environmental racism, compulsory schooling of indigenous peoples, and normative sexual and gender categories.

“Incarceration facilitates...fatal forms of oppressive violence through the power relations of race, gender, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, national origin, religion, and citizenship, among other socially ascribed differentiations of human beings.”



# Intergenerational Trauma and the mental health of Black Americans

## Definitions

Intergenerational trauma: The physical and mental effects of trauma passing down from a source to the descendants of that source.

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: When a population experiences intergenerational trauma from centuries of slavery, oppression, and racism.

Racial battle fatigue: The physical and mental toll from living under oppression and racism.

Epigenetics: The physiological effect of trauma on DNA.

Cultural competency: Applying the cultural and social context of a group of people to how it can affect their lived experience.

## Origins of intergenerational trauma

The source, or *initial stressor*, of intergenerational trauma for Black people comes from a variety of sources. Over the course of Black people's oppression the following has contributed to the passing down of trauma:

- Transatlantic slave trade
- Slavery
- Jim Crow

These initial stressors can be marked as the beginning of the snowball that is Black people's intergenerational trauma. This trauma snowball grows with the following stressors:

- The carceral state (over incarceration, over policing, etc.)
- Police violence
- Gun violence
- "Legalized" racism
  - Stop and Frisk
  - Redlining
  - Flint water crisis
  - Daily microaggressions and discrimination (racial battle fatigue)

These ideas are re-emphasized through media, film, and TV, thus contributing to the ongoing traumatizing of Black people.

## How is it transmitted?

Intergenerational trauma is transmitted *physiologically*. This transmission shows up in Black people's DNA, found using something called *epigenetics*. Epigenetics accounts for the physical transmission of trauma, and explains how *an environment can mutate DNA in response to stressors*.

This mutation comes as a result of a baby's stress hormone profiles being altered. For example, if a slave woman was pregnant, the environmental stressors (fieldwork, abuse, assault, etc.) experienced by the mother would be experienced by the baby as well, and impact their stress profile at a genetic level before it's even born. *The baby would be born with the effects of events they did not experience first hand*. This is called *fetal PTSD* (post traumatic stress disorder).

### What are the effects?

Intergenerational trauma shows up as deteriorated mental health. Mental illnesses like depression, anxiety, PTSD, schizophrenia, and learning disabilities such as ADHD or dyslexia are common.

These illnesses go untreated due to the taboo nature of mental health in the Black community and racism in the medical field. Black people are suffering the effects of centuries of trauma, but it is not addressed due to stigma. Additionally, mental health and medical professionals do not appropriately diagnose these issues in Black patients due to institutionalized racism in the medical field.

### What are stigmas around mental illness in the Black community?

Common responses to mental health issues are:

- “Mental illness is for white people”
- “You’re not depressed you’re just sad”
- “Why are you depressed, you have a roof over your head and food on the table”

Mental illness is also seen as a sign of weakness. Admitting to experiencing negative mental health or mental illness is seen as a failure or unacceptable. In fact, 63% of Black Americans see depression as a personal weakness.

Those who seek treatment tend to also face discouraging messages from their community. This, in turn:

- Promotes ineffective forms of treatment and unhealthy coping mechanisms
- Emphasizes self- sufficiency
- Can turn to religion as a *replacement* for therapy or counseling

### Medical racism’s role in deterring Black people from seeking treatment

Racist ideology is ingrained in practices of medical professionals and institutions. This started ever since Black people were taken to be slaves, and still exists today. The most known example is the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. In the study, 600 Black men with syphilis were studied over the course of their lives. They were not given a diagnosis, nor were they ever given treatment. Some men passed the disease onto their children and lives were lost.

In current day, medical racism is seen in Black women’s birth mortality rate. Black women are twice as likely to have a premature birth than white women, and a Black baby is twice as likely to die in the first year of their life than a white baby. Additionally, because of intergenerational trauma and its effects, Black children are more susceptible to mental health issues (depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, etc.) but are the least to be diagnosed. Often, these children are incorrectly diagnosed with behavioral disorders.

### What can help?

Because intergenerational trauma is inescapable, seeking mental health therapy can not only improve the mental wellbeing of Black people, but identify symptoms of trauma. Many of these symptoms go undiagnosed due to medical racism and *culturally incompetent* mental health treatment.

Mental health professionals and medical professionals in general should increase their cultural competence when dealing with Black patients. This will lead to accurate diagnosing/treatment as well as an increased breadth of medical data available on Black people to aid future research.

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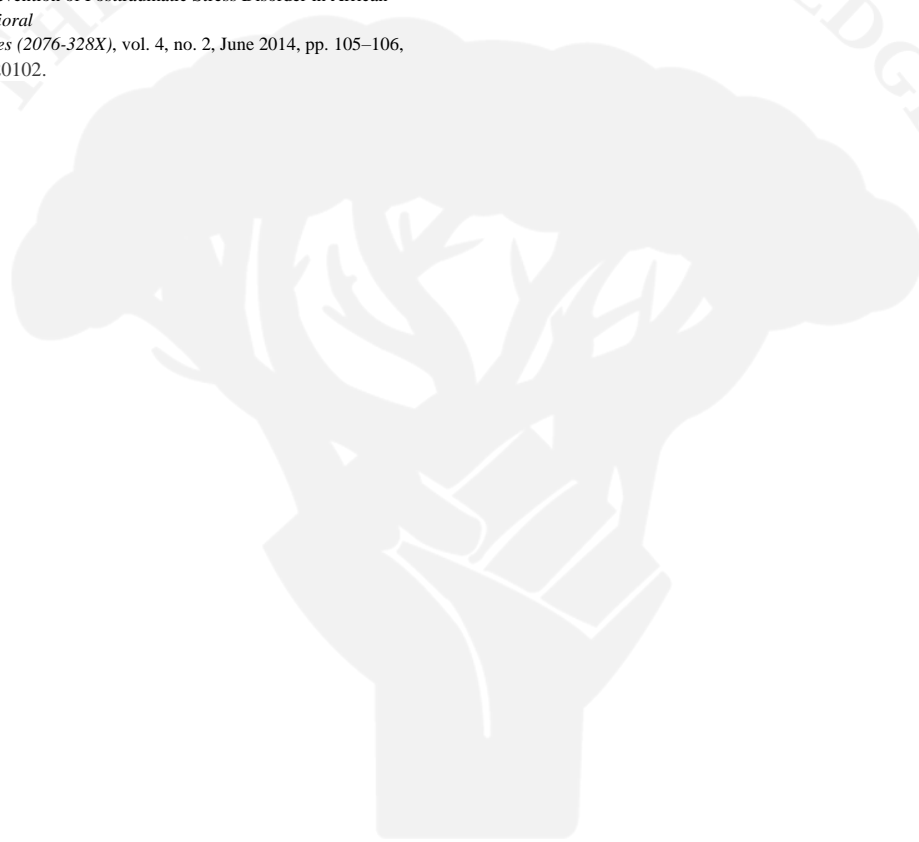
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## The Basics of Restorative Justice

Center for Justice & Reconciliation. n.d. "Lesson 1: What Is Restorative Justice?" Center for Justice & Reconciliation.

### What is restorative justice?

Restorative justice tackles the harm done by a crime committed instead of punishment. This is done through collaborative processes that lead to the transformation of people and communities.

### Four components of restorative justice

- Inclusion
- Encounter
- Amends
- Reintegration
- Inclusion
  - Inclusion allows for the full participation of all parties affected by the harm done
  - This can be accomplished through 1) inviting all interested parties to participate 2) expecting and allowing people to pursue their own interests, and 3) accepting new approaches and perspectives
  - As of now, the criminal justice system is centered around prosecution. This does not allow for the centering of the lived experience of the victim
  - Methods of inclusion
    - Information: keeping the victim up to date on the processes and providing resources and compensation
    - Presence in court: Many victims are not allowed to be present in court for all proceedings in fear of it jeopardizing a "fair" trial
    - Victim impact statements: allowing victims to share the impact of the harm done and give recommendations for consequences
- Encounter
  - Having the victim and offender encounter one another via a meeting, letters, video, etc.
  - Elements of encounter
    - Meeting: whether it's through representatives for each party, letters, or other indirect forms of interaction, the key is to have the parties engage
    - Narrative: Each party tells their story and how it has affected them
    - Emotion: Dispassionate retelling of events does not allow room for restoration. Emotion in narrative sharing allows for crime to be addressed not with cold ration but with the emotion it needs
    - Understanding: narrative and emotion lead to understanding, and the ability to see the individual outside of their actions. This does not necessarily guarantee a positive perception, but is a step towards restoration
    - Agreement: Meeting, narrative, emotion, and understanding lays the foundation for the parties to come to an agreement and lay out a plan for consequences for the offender
- Amends
  - For elements of making amends

- Apology: A written or vulnerable apology where the offender **acknowledges** what they've done and why it was wrong, shows that doing wrong has negatively **affected** them and show genuine remorse, and be **vulnerable** enough to say I'm sorry
  - Changed behavior: On the most basic level this means no longer committing crimes. However, in order to truly be restorative, it also means treatment programs, educational classes, and other forms of rehabilitation
  - Generosity: performing acts of service in a way that has nothing to do with the victim or the offense
  - Restitution: goes directly to the victim or people suffering, can be monetary or replacing whatever is damaged
- Reintegration
    - Allowing offenders to become active in their communities again and forgiven for their wrongdoings. Stigma and stereotypes around people who have committed crimes prevents people from bring fully reintegrated into society.
    - Methods of reintegration
      - Support groups
      - Circles of support (provide more accountability than support groups, less focused on emotional support)
      - Faith communities

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# The Intersection of Blackness, Queerness, and Masculinity

## Definitions

**Queer:** An overall term for any person a part of the LGBT+ community.

**Cis-het:** Short for cis-gendered heterosexual; any person whose gender aligns with the sex they were born as, and are attracted to people of the opposite sex.

**Queerphobia:** The hatred, disgust, or discomfort with queer people.

**Patriarchy:** A system where men are dominant/hold authority in all parts of society.

## Homophobia in the Black community

Homophobia is a common ideology found within the Black community. This belief comes from religion, society, or personal prejudiced values. Black homophobia assumes that cis-het Black people are the only victims of white supremacist institutions, when in reality it affects all people.

Black homophobia also pits the community against each other. The Black queer struggle should be considered in Black liberation discourse to avoid the further division in the community. Failure to do so extends oppression to another group while the Black community themselves are also oppressed.

What causes homophobia to continue?

- “Do what you want as long as I don’t have to see it”
  - This mindset forces queer people to hide who they are for the comfort of others
- Religion
  - Used as a weapon against Black queer folks, just as a racist uses religion against a Black person
- Conventional masculinity

## Masculinity’s role in creating and perpetuating homophobia

Since the freedom of Black people in the 19th century, masculinity is seen as the pathway to respect and equality for Black peoples’ This began in the Reconstruction Era when the community faced new economic and legal struggles.

Black masculinity is proven by:

- Frequent sexual activity
- Power or success, specifically in white societal terms
- Exertion of confidence
- Being a provider for a wife and children
- Competition or fighting

Masculinity was used as a tool to be seen as equal to white society, but has evolved into a tool to oppress members of the Black community. Masculinity is a rejection of anything that is not feminine, and those things are expected to be subordinate to masculine things. This leads to queerphobia.

For example, a man who doesn’t want to have sex with multiple women is labeled as gay, or a man who does not want to engage in an exhibition of competition or violence is a “bitch” or a “pussy”. These are

all terms associated with women and queer people, and is framed as the negative outcome of not being masculine.

The Black community's reception of Black feminism and Black woman's autonomy over their sexuality parallels their attitude about gender and sexuality in general. Homophobia is a manifestation of sexual oppression, which is about gender roles (who can and cannot do what); queerness disrupts those roles and is deemed negative.

### The Black, queer, experience

Queer people, specifically gay men, have to hide their identity in an effort to adhere to traditional masculinity. They fear and face rejection and violence from their community. Black queer people are forced to straddle their need for community in a racialized society with the queerness in a community that is not accepting. Black queer people's very existence challenges the white supremacist ideology that Black liberation fights against.

### Disintegration

Disintegration is the societal trade off that comes with adopting and uplifting all forms of Blackness, specifically women and queer people. Our society relies on the subordination of anything or anyone that does not feed masculinity and male dominance (patriarchy). If the Black community abandons those ideas and supports everyone who is Black, regardless of what additional identities they hold, they will be disintegrated from broad society.

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## Exploitation of Labor and Black Suffering Under Capitalism

### Definitions

Means of production: how goods and services are produced and distributed

Capitalism: The means of production are privately owned and operated

Ruling class: Those who control the means of production

### Capitalism does not allow autonomy over labor

Because capitalism is motivated by maximizing profits, it does not facilitate the ability for workers to choose when, where, and for how long they sell their labor. What is produced and how it is produced is left to the ruling class. Capitalism requires the subordination of laborers to continue; people are required to work in order to survive and provide basic necessities like food, housing, and healthcare. This requirement of work for survival makes the threat of unemployment terrifying and life altering.

These conditions are masked as something to aspire to, like The American Dream. The ideal of the American Dream glorifies working to provide basic needs necessary to survival. It also normalizes subordination to the ruling class and creates a false belief that “hard work” is the only key to success as it is defined under capitalism.

### Capitalism breeds inequality

Capitalism creates divisions that fall along racial and class lines. These systems cannot function without a ruling and impoverished class, meaning there will always be someone suffering at the bottom of the class hierarchy. Black and Indigenous Americans are the most direct victims of suffering under Capitalism.

The U.S. began as a settler colonial state, stealing land from Indigenous folks and forcing labor of enslaved Africans. This is called double theft: land and labor. Capitalist systems are white supremacist systems. This is seen with the prison industry as a tool of capitalism, described as a “growth industry”, which relies on the oppression and captivity of Black people to survive.

### Assigning value to labor

The inequality under capitalism can be observed in how value is assigned to certain peoples’ labor. *Wages of whiteness* is the economic value given to white skin; and all other laborers have their value determined in relation to that. The value of property or labor (which is treated as property) is determined by its proximity to whiteness. For example, housing in predominantly white neighborhoods is valued higher than housing in predominantly Black neighborhoods.

Value is determined in relation to how others interact with the property or labor. What would people be willing to pay or spend resources on?

### Monetizing human rights

Capitalist ideologies impact social and civil society. Demands for human rights from oppressed peoples (healthcare, housing, abolishing police systems including ICE) is always explained in terms of the “cost” it will have. This makes it easier to justify white supremacist beliefs that people of color and Black folks are receiving a type of underserved “gain” like Affirmative Action.

Speaking about human beings in terms of financial loss or gain warps one's concept of their personhood.

What does an anti-capitalist future look like?

People are not meant to exploit their labor for resources necessary to survive. A future free of capitalism is a future where these basic needs are provided. An anti-capitalist future gives the means of production to the people, and returns autonomy of labor to the hands of the laborers.

Capitalism removes control of material conditions from the individual, and demands a subservience to a ruling class. This cannot be solved by "trickle down economics" or more Black and oppressed communities engaging in capitalist systems. Even when Black folks take advantage of capitalist systems to get ahead, their labor is still not equitably valued. A future free of capitalism means the ability for people to dedicate their labor to creative and socially meaningful work.

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# Black Revolutionaries' Adoption of Maoism

## Key Definitions

Maoism: An evolution of Marxism and Leninism that takes the theoretical application of both ideologies and applies them to a practical application (originally in 1950s China). In Maoism, everyone possesses the revolutionary willpower to transform themselves and society.

Labor aristocracy: A pseudo-ruling class that is bought out by the actual ruling class to maintain power over the proletariat. Their standard of living is dependent on capitalism, so they work to uphold it (middle managers, landlords, etc.).

Anti-revisionism: A belief system that challenges the erasure/modification of leftist history for the benefit of Western dominance and capitalism. Revisionism vilifies leftist revolutionaries like Huey P. Newton, Mao Zedong, and Malcolm X.

## Who is Mao Zedong?

Mao Zedong, also known as Chairman Mao and Mao Tse Tung, was the founder of the People's Republic of China and leader of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The Chinese Cultural Revolution was an anti-capitalist and anti-revisionist proletariat revolution that aimed to eradicate Western capitalist and imperialist thought from China.

## Chairman Mao and the Black Panther Party

Mao and his ideology had a heavy influence on the operations and direction of Black radicalism in the 1960s. The Black Panther Party (BPP) and its leadership was a Communist organization guided by Maoist principles. *Black radicals saw China as a place where freedom could be accomplished; it was a formerly colonized state that successfully led their people toward a leftist revolution.*

Huey P. Newton, the BPP founder, described China as a "sensation of freedom—as if a great weight had been lifted from my soul and I was able to be myself, without defense or pretense or the need for explanation. I felt absolutely free for the first time in my life—completely free among my fellow men."

The BPP extended their support to China in their battle against imperialism and Soviet influence during the Cold War. In a 1969 address, Newton supported the Chinese Communist Party's anti-revisionist efforts against the Soviet Union and the United States:

“Trends in [the United States] to form closer ties to the Soviet Union... are further indications of the revisionism which has led the people of Russia and the people under her control, closer into the gaping jaws of colonialism and the searing teeth of capitalism.”

## Why was Maoism attractive to Black revolutionaries?

The Black Panthers were not the only Black revolutionaries inspired by Mao. Leaders such as Vicki Garvin and Malcolm X drew influence from Maoist principles. The Black liberation struggle was framed as a domestic issue, cutting connections to the international struggle against colonialism and capitalism. As described by Robert Williams, “the Afro-American's struggle for liberation is a part of an invincible world-wide movement. Chairman Mao was the first world leader to elevate our people's struggle to the fold of the world revolution.”

Maoism also underscored ethics and morality in the revolution. This was attractive to religious Black radicals like Malcolm X. Additionally, the order and self-discipline that Mao promoted appealed to Huey P. Newton and the BPP.

### **The Maoist Internationalist Movement**

The Maoist Internationalist Movement (MIM) is a modern application of Maoism started in the late 1990s out of Los Angeles. They interpret current manifestations of white supremacy and capitalism, like state police violence and the intentional imprisonment of Black people, through a Maoist perspective. The MIM operates off three main principles:

- 1) Once the working class assumes control of the means of production in a socialist revolution, there is an unfortunate possibility of a resurgence of capitalism under a new bourgeoisie. This was seen with the Soviet Union after Stalin, and China after Mao.
- 2) The Chinese Cultural Revolution is the most successful communist revolution in history.
- 3) Imperialism extracts resources from the Global South and sells their capital to buy-out the labor aristocracy.

The MIM combines the material conditions of settler colonial states in North America with Maoist beliefs. One way they demonstrate a resistance to imperialism is in intentional re-spellings of certain words:

Womyn and Persyn: de-gendering the way we refer to people.

I\$rael, Kanada, and the United \$nakes of AmeriKKKa: All colonial states that maintain colonial rule.

They exclude Mexico when they say "North Amerika," because "k" stands for the gluttony and effects of imperialism. They also exclude those indigenous to the continent who do not benefit from "U.\$ minimum wage laws and the welfare state."

### **Taking Black Maoism Into the 21st Century**

The Maoist-Marxist-Leninist principles that influenced the Black Panther Party played a huge role in its destruction. Maoist Internationalism is a contemporary perspective on historically theoretical principles. Black revolutionary movements can adopt Maoism at the core of their work, building off the international and cross-cultural connections that were built in the 1960s. Combining Maoism with the organizing history within the Black American community can lead to successful leftist revolution.

Read more:

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## Who is Presentable in a White Society?

### Definitions

Assimilation: Generally by coercion, the taking on of a dominant society's characteristics, culture, etc. in order to blend in.

Pro-white bias: A subconscious preference for white features and presentation.

Social contract: An unspoken agreement by people in a community or society to behave or look a certain way.

Whiteness: A racial power that subordinates a racialized "other." It is an identity and a position of privilege that anyone can benefit from when aligned with it.

White supremacy: A central belief assuming that white people are superior, and encompasses the actions taken based on this assumption.

### White supremacy's reach

Because we live in a society built on white supremacy, there are many ways those beliefs and practices can make their way into mainstream thought. One way of doing so is through *assimilation*, where a group of people must let go of aspects of their own culture or identity to fit larger society. This is not maintained by just one or a few people but continues by the will of many who align with these practices.

The effects of white supremacy are experienced by the victims and benefactors of whiteness. *Whiteness* is an extension of white supremacy and can be carried out by anyone. This includes Black people and people of color. Whiteness is a tool used to uphold white supremacy. It is an ideal that general society agrees to under a social contract and can be enforced in many ways.

One way is through standards of presentation, dress, and beauty. Whiteness influences the way we view what is or is not presentable. This causes things such as the following to be heavily regulated on anyone who is not white:

- Hairstyles
- Headwear
- Formal attire
- Language/dialect
- Loungewear/comfort clothing

### Whiteness is a habit that can be broken

Because whiteness has a hold on the way we view ourselves and others in society, it can be disrupted. By questioning our perspective, whiteness' hold on our mindset can be eroded. However, because white supremacy is a group-process, there are practices that make a resistance to this mindset difficult.

How can we understand where whiteness shapes our perspective? Ask the following:

- Is how white people may react/feel molding my outlook?
- Does this perspective put down marginalized peoples or undervalue their culture/identity?
- What is this rooted in? Is it with the intention to assimilate into white society?

### **Who set the standard?**

In interrogating our thinking, we can uncover paradoxes in our understanding. Where do these standards come from, and are they attainable? The idea of professionalism comes from a working person who obtains the desirable (desirable to whom?) level of skills and education, and is able to join the [labor aristocracy](#). This class of people is historically white and male. *Professionalism is a practice of assimilation*, assuming the behavior and appearance of a dominant culture to appease their standards.

The same goes for what is considered presentable in everyday society. Certain features, aesthetics, and even body types are unacceptable and heavily regulated. Because this is an extension of whiteness, the only way to truly appease white society is to dawn white skin. This is directly oppressive to marginalized peoples whose cultures and personhood does not fit this image or align with the *pro-white bias*.

### **Breaking the habit**

In order to build a truly multicultural society, what is considered presentable and professional in public should be reexamined. White supremacy permits the scrutiny and regulation of marginalized peoples, especially Black women, for the purpose of enforcing a colonized mindset.

For example, what is considered formal wear (i.e. tuxedos, suits, dresses, etc.) is even dominated by a Western perspective. Cultures all over the world and within this society have their own formal attire, but the white understanding of formal attire is our societal default. This principle can be applied to how we leave the house, how we do our hair, the way we communicate, and even how we celebrate (i.e. applauding at graduation ceremonies).

Working toward total Black liberation and our ideal society means breaking the hold whiteness has on one's mindset and outlook. It's an uncomfortable process, but necessary for collective growth and freedom. Our culture and appearance as Black people is something to be dawned with pride, not hidden for the comfort of our oppressors.

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