

Anti-racism
Guide *for*
White Muslims

Oh you who believe!

Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even if against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for God can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you swerve, and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that you do.” (4:135)¹

1. Introduction²

This toolkit is meant to be a guide for white Muslims who are engaging in anti-racism work and/or simply participating in discussions about racism in society and in the Muslim community.

As people who are both white and Muslim, we straddle two identities - one privileged in society and the other, not. We experience Islamophobia to varying degrees, sometimes more overtly depending on how we physically present, and at the same time we have been socialized as white people in a society where white people hold more social power than People of Color (POC). The focus of the toolkit is to provide resources and information that will help guide us toward good practices and behaviours, and away from harmful ones, as we challenge racism within the Muslim community (ummah) and in society at large.

Some white Muslims hold mistaken ideas about race and privilege, thinking that because we are Muslim and racism is contrary to the values of Islam, that we can prevent racism by living as if the notion of race does not exist. In doing so, some white Muslims both avoid conversations about racism (and view discussions about racism as creating a divide in the community) and also choose to live as if they do not have a racial identity or that they have transcended their racial identity. While these views are intended to be well-meaning, they in fact help to keep racism alive because those acts do nothing to uproot racism,

and shutting down conversations about racism only serves to allow it to continue.

As people who are both white and Muslim, it is mistaken to believe that because we are Muslim, we are above the concept of having a race or that we no longer experience white privilege. Racialization is not something that one chooses. We live in a society where all people are racialized from the time we are born, meaning that certain traits, values and stereotypes are associated with the race we are perceived to be. Even if one is a white Muslim who is often perceived by the public to be Middle Eastern due to one's dress or beard or hijab, we have been socialized as white people, with messages from our families, teachers, media and society about whiteness under an umbrella of white supremacy, both subtle and overt. We grew up without the lived experience of racism that People of Color have. This has both shaped and limited our understanding of racism.

If you feel that you no longer are always physically assumed to be white because of your clothing and appearance, and believe you no longer experience some aspects of white privilege in non-Muslim public contexts, you still have the responsibility to reflect on how white people are privileged in society and use that knowledge to challenge racism. It is important to recognize that among people who know you as white, and especially among Muslims of color, you still retain white privilege.

¹Dalia Mogahed notes, "I had never noticed that the aya warns those who distort and those who decline to do justice. For all this time I thought this powerful warning and appeal to stand for justice was one to dissuade us from following our desires instead of the truth in judgement. But it also warns us from standing on the sidelines, seeing injustice and refusing to do anything about it."

²For definitions of key terms see the definitions on page 12 or <http://www.muslimarc.org/resources/anti-racism-glossary/>



2. What is our role in addressing racism in the ummah?

Racism in the ummah manifests itself in several ways:

- Racism, particularly against Black, Latinx, or Indigenous Muslims by other Muslims of color, and the denial of this racism
- Racism against Muslims of color by white Muslims, and the denial of this racism
- Privileging of, or better treatment of, white Muslim converts over converts of color (white privilege in the ummah)

Presently the most common form of racism in the ummah is anti-Blackness as perpetuated by non-Black Muslims. What, then, is our role as white Muslims in addressing this?

It is important that we:

- Amplify the voices of Black Muslims, Latinx Muslims, and Indigenous Muslims and any other Muslims of color who are working to call attention to racism that they experience in the ummah
- Ensure that we are not focusing on anti-Black racism by non-Black Muslims of color as a means of deflecting the focus away from how white people perpetuate and benefit from racism and white privilege
- Learn about and work with other white Muslims to address how white Muslims perpetuate racism and how we can be actively anti-racist, supporting both anti-racism initiatives in the Muslim community and in society at large

3. In which ways do white Muslims perpetuate racism, and what should we do or not do in our work to actively be anti-racist?

We contribute to the persistence of racism when we define racism solely as overt expressions of hate/dislike for a group of people (or a person) based on their race.

A first important step towards addressing racism is to expand one's understanding of the many ways in which racism is manifested in society.

We perpetuate racism when we deny that racism exists in the ummah and deny that white Muslims can be racist.

Denying that racism exists does not make racism go away. Rather, denial of racism contributes to its perpetuation.

We allow racism to persist when we do not invest time to learn about racism and the lived realities of People of Color, and when we do not invest time in challenging racism and white privilege. To learn more:

1. Sign up for anti-racism courses online or in your community. Some online options are listed in the Resources section of this Guide.
2. Follow the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative online, as well as other Muslim groups/individuals who actively work to address racism in the ummah and in society.
3. Learn about racism from books authored by People of Color and about white anti-racism from books authored by anti-racist white people.
4. Actively commit to challenging racism and white privilege.
5. Believe black Muslims and Muslim POC when they share their experiences with you. Do not minimize or attempt to explain or contextualize what they've experienced.

We perpetuate racism when we try to present ourselves as exceptions to the rule, rather than looking at racism as a system in which we are implicated.

Racism is not solely about explicit expressions of prejudice or overt acts of hate. As white people, we are socialized in a way that results in not being able to fully recognize or understand how racism is perpetuated in society. This includes an inability to see our own racism as well as being complicit in racism by our silence. Don't deny racism - take steps to learn about it in all its forms.

We perpetuate racism when we believe we are above this discourse on race and racism, and that we are "just Muslim."

Allah tells us in the **Quran (49:13)** *that we were made into nations and tribes so that we may know one another*. Islam is applicable to all cultures at all times. We do not need to reject our culture or ethnicity to be Muslims.

While we can acknowledge that race is a social construct, racism has real effects on people's lives and it will not go away just by people asserting that they are raceless or "just Muslim". We need to be able to talk about race, racialization and racism in order to uproot it.

We perpetuate racism when we take a "color blind" approach to it, and when we try to paint a rosy picture of the relationships in our community.

Do not make comments that are of a naive or "color blind" nature (e.g. "I love everyone - black, white, purple," or "in my community these problems don't exist"). While well meaning, such comments are dismissive and/or silencing of the reality of racism and do nothing to help us as a community and as a society to address racism.

We perpetuate racism when we deny that we experience white privilege.

For those of us who are not visibly identifiable as Muslim, we can avoid harassment and are not targeted to the same degree as people who are visibly read as Muslims in public. We do not experience what Muslims of color experience.

We perpetuate racism when we claim that because we are Muslim we are subject to the same level of discrimination as People of Color.

Based on outward appearance (hijab, thobe, beard, kufi) some white Muslims are assumed by the public to be People of Color---often Middle Eastern or South Asian, instead of white. Even if this is the case for you, it is important to recognize that when you were perceived as white, you were the benefactor of white privilege, and people who know you to be white (co-workers, friends, family, community members, etc.) still afford you privileges and opportunities that would not be awarded to People of Color.

We perpetuate racism when we turn a conversation about racism into a conversation about our own experiences of discrimination

1. White Muslims perpetuate racism when they frame being treated poorly as a convert with experiencing “anti-white” racism in the ummah.
2. Anti-white racism does not exist because racism by default is a system that benefits white people and harms People of Color.
3. Negative treatment of converts is a product of a sense of religious superiority by those who have been raised as Muslims.
4. Negative treatment of white people by People of Color, when it occurs, can be a response to the racism that People of Color experience daily.
5. Do not conflate the negative experiences of being a white convert with the racism which People of Color experience. Do not use experiences of being treated poorly as a white convert as proof that you can somehow understand what it must feel like to experience racism. Doing this demonstrates a lack of understanding of what racism truly is.

People of Color do not share the same level of cultural capital with white members of society. Sharing this cultural capital with fellow white people privileges you. It can help you attain jobs, and makes you more acceptable to white colleagues, white authority figures or the police, for example. It can allow other white people to view you as a source of authority before they would accept a person of color in that role. White people are often more likely to be open-minded to discourse on racism when it is delivered by fellow white people for this reason.

It is important to take what you have learned about white privilege and use that knowledge to call attention to how racism is a system which offers white people opportunities and more positive experiences than People of Color, and to understand that being Muslim does not obliterate that fact.

Being raised as a white person, you also have a significant degree of what is called “cultural capital” with other white people. This is a form of social currency based on cultural facets of life shared with white people, and includes things like manner of speaking, cultural values, points of reference, sense of humor, reverence of particular cultural icons, personal aesthetics, style of teaching or conveying information, base of common knowledge, ways of occupying space, and more.

Even when non-Muslim whites are uncomfortable with you or suspicious of you for being Muslim, this shared cultural capital connects you to non-Muslim whites in a way that puts them somewhat at ease, and makes them read you as someone who is culturally recognizable, safe, and “normal”.

If we have children, we perpetuate racism if we take a “color blind” approach to raising our children (of color, or white) without a strong understanding of racism and racial identity/recognition of whiteness.

Again, pretending that we don't see race, or that if we don't talk about racism, it won't exist, is an unrealistic way to eliminate racism from society. It must be confronted head on.

Children must be raised to understand racism in society and how they can work to address it.

Children of color must be effectively prepared to understand their identity and racism they may face. They must know that they can go to their parents to discuss their experiences of racism, and the experiences will never be downplayed or dismissed.

White children need to learn about racism/white supremacy and white privilege.

It is important for us to seek out tools for parenting from an anti-racist perspective. See Resources.

We perpetuate racism when we choose to call attention to the anti-Black racism of non-Black Muslims of color but are unwilling to call attention to racism by white Muslims.

It is important to address both, and not point fingers towards Muslims of color for their anti-Black racism while being silent on how white Muslims also uphold racism and benefit from white privilege.

Calling attention solely to anti-Black racism as perpetuated by non-Black Muslims of color is a means to distract from talking about white people's racism and is, in fact, hypocritical.

As cited at the opening of this guide, it is our obligation as Muslims to strive for justice (4:135) and that includes addressing all forms of racial injustice.

We perpetuate racism when we try to use the fact that we are Muslims to shield ourselves from anyone calling attention to our racism, or critiquing our lack of commitment to addressing racism.

1. Do not use your religion or the fact that you are married to a person of color, or have children of color, as proof that you are 'not racist'.

2. Racism is a system, and as such, is often perpetuated either unintentionally or as a result of hidden biases. It is not only about individually held prejudice toward People of Color. You can have friends of color, have converted to Islam, be married to a person of color and have children of color and still perpetuate racism unintentionally, either directly or passively.

4. Steps that white Muslims can take to be actively anti-racist

- The first step is to learn about the definitions of racism (overt, systemic, institutional, internalized) and white privilege and how they are manifested.
- Amplify the voices of Muslims of color who speak about racism by sharing articles, videos, or other media. Make it a point to share with fellow white Muslims.
- Take responsibility for the posting of those resources by monitoring the comments on the posts and addressing any comments which deny or downplay the existence of racism, or frame anti-convert biases as “anti-white” racism.
- When sharing resources, share the link to the original source so that others can follow those sites as well.
- Promote courses such as MuslimARC’s anti-racism online educational materials, and anti-racism courses directed at white people. If there is a fee to participate, consider offering to pay for a portion for another person, to increase access to the course.
- If a mosque, Muslim Students Association or community organization in your city organizes an event on racism in the ummah, or seminars on topics such as Black Muslims in History, invite friends (especially those who have never shown interest in such topics) to attend with you.
- If you belong to a Muslim organization, advocate for it to host an event on racism in the ummah.
- When others share resources on topics such as racism in the ummah, demonstrate support for those posts (through “likes” or positive comments) even if you have already posted them yourself or if the articles are old. It can be hard for some people to post on those topics and it’s important to demonstrate to viewers who typically don’t display an interest in such topics that in fact those articles are relevant and important.
- Work on finding productive ways to talk about how white Muslims perpetuate racism and on what our (nuanced) role is in addressing racism in the Muslim community. If you have found an effective way to explain certain concepts to others, particularly from the perspective of a white Muslim, consider writing an article or filming a short video so that other white Muslims can be exposed to these reflections.
- Develop spaces like MuslimARC Circles or Facebook groups to share ideas, challenge each other, and develop good anti-racism practices.
- Join actions organized by People of Color in your community, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, e.g. Black Lives Matter.
- Pay attention to how you might dominate a conversation. Learn when it is appropriate to speak up on a topic which is relevant for you and when to listen to others who have more direct lived experiences with the topic at hand.
- Financially support organizations doing work in anti-racism.

Behaviours to avoid:

- Don't assume what POC need and try to swoop in to deliver. Instead, ask what you can do.
- Don't replicate oppressive systems and rhetoric. If someone asks for your assistance, provide it, but do not make assumptions about what is beneficial by volunteering when someone has not demonstrated a need.
- Don't assume it is the job of POC to teach you about their issues or correct your mistakes. When they do offer education or correction, listen, digest the information, learn, and change your behavior. Appreciate that they've taken the time with you.
- Do not involve yourself only in the issues most important to you. Find out what racism-related issues are currently prioritized by POC in your community and provide support on those issues. Trust their judgment.
- Don't label yourself as an ally. Allyship is demonstrated by one's actions on a continuous basis. Only a POC can decide if they truly see you as an ally, and one person calling you an ally does not mean all POC will see you as such.



5. Educational Resources:

Trainings

- [Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative courses](#)
(They provide a foundation for anti-racism work from an Islamic framework)
- The [Hard Conversations: An Introduction to Racism](#) course provides an excellent foundation for diving into anti-racism work, without being too basic. Experienced facilitators can also learn from the course's design.
- The [Undoing Racism workshop](#) offered by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond.

White Muslims

- [White Muslims and Racism: Joining the Conversations](#)
- [Racialized Muslim Bodies and White Revert Privilege](#)
- [Being a White Muslim](#)
- [A Residue Remains: Using White Privilege in The Ummah](#)
- [Inter-Racial Distrust and the White Muslim](#)
- [MuslimARC panel discussion #BeingAWhiteMuslim](#) (Part 1)
- [White Supremacy – the Beginning of Modern Day Shirk?](#) A lecture by Dr. Sherman Jackson

Allyship

- [Definition of Allyship](#)
- [10 Tips for Being a Good Ally](#)
- [Allyship Post-Trump: 5 Things to Remember](#)
- [Being a Good Ally](#)

Understanding Racism

- [Racism: Why Whites Have Trouble Getting It](#)
- [White Folks Only Understand the Dictionary Definition of Racism](#)
- [Racism 101 for Clueless White People, Written by a Slightly Less Clueless White Person](#)
- [How One White Person Can Make a Difference in Fighting Racism](#)
- [13th Film](#): A phenomenal documentary on racism, the justice system & mass incarceration in the US.
- [The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness](#)
(The New Press, 2010) by Michelle Alexander:
- [White Nonsense Roundup Facebook](#)

Anti-racist parenting

- [Parents Guide for Teaching Muslim Children about Black History Month](#)
- [Showing Up for Racial Justice - Families / Website](#)
- [Raising Race Conscious Children: Facebook / Website](#)
- [The Answers: A Parent's Guide to Discussing Racism with their Children](#)
- [EmbraceRace Facebook Page](#)

6. Organizations

MuslimARC

Website: www.muslimarc.org/

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/muslimarc/>

Twitter: @MuslimARC

Zinn Education Project

Website: <https://www.zinnedproject.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ZinnEducationProject>

Teaching for Tolerance

Website: <https://www.tolerance.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TeachingTolerance.org>

Crossroad Anti-Racism Organizing and Training

Website: <http://crossroadsantiracism.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/dismantlingwhitesupremacy/>

Showing Up for Racial Justice

Website: <http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ShowingUpForRacialJusticesurj/>

7. Definitions:

Allyship: a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people. Allyship is not self-defined — our work and our efforts must be recognized by the people we seek to ally ourselves with.

Discrimination: the practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people.

Ethnicity: a group of people with common traits, background, and associations. Refers to cultural background (i.e., language, food, and style of clothing). (See the definition of Race for a comparison.)

Institutionalized Oppression: occurs when established laws, customs, and practices systematically reflect and produce inequities based on one's membership in targeted social identity groups. If oppressive consequences accrue to institutional laws, customs, or practices, the institution is oppressive whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have oppressive intentions.

Intersectionality: Interconnected nature of forms of oppression against particular groups of people. An approach largely advanced by women of color, arguing that classifications such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ability, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they interact and intersect in individuals' lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive.

Privilege: benefits or advantages given to members of a dominant group in society because of their membership in this group, and from which members of other groups are excluded in part or altogether.

Race: as a social construct, a group of people related in a common descent or ancestry often linked to phenotype (i.e. skin color, hair texture, facial features).

Racial justice: a proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all. The racial justice definition includes these beliefs and acts, but considers individual acts of prejudice only one dimension of racism. Includes dominant narratives, oppressive policies, and real world consequences of these policies.

Racism: the systematic unequal distribution of rights, privileges, resources, and protections along racial lines and the assignment of worth, ability, and value according to race.

Stereotypes: attitudes, beliefs, feelings and assumptions about a target group that are widespread and are considered 'normal' in the public sphere. These can be positive and negative, but all have negative effects. Stereotypes are used to justify the oppression of the group being stereotyped.

Systemic Racism: discrimination built into the way organizations and governments operate, often involving informal activities and cultures.

White supremacy: while often understood in mainstream society to mean overt racism perpetuated by hate groups such as the Klu Klux Klan, white supremacy in activist and academic circles is synonymous with Racism as a socio-economic system where white people enjoy a structural advantage (privilege) over other racialized groups, both at a collective and an individual level.



www.muslimarc.org