

## 2 Culture, Ethnicity and Race: Working Definitions

Read through the following definitions and take note of where you learn something or have further questions.

### VOCABULARY

**ASSIMILATION** – The cultural absorption of a minority group into the main or dominant culture. To become like, be alike and resemble the dominant culture by being absorbed or incorporated into it or adopting the norms of the majority culture. There can be a variety of reasons for why assimilation occurs.

**CODE SWITCH** – The action of editing or adjusting how one engages with those around them who are culturally different.

**COLORBLINDNESS** – The racial ideology that suggests the best way to end discrimination is by refusing to acknowledge race. This approach can lead to the discussion of race as being taboo or the invalidating of ethnic identity.

**CULTURE** – The customs, beliefs, social forms and material traits of a particular ethnic, racial, religious or social group. It is reflected in the language, speech patterns, behaviors, attitudes, artifacts, and relational styles that are unique to that group.

**DIVERSITY** – The presence of different types of people within a given setting, such as a team, workplace, church or organization. These differences can include such things as ethnicity, gender, age, marital status, income level, educational background, and a host of other factors.

**ETHNIC-FOCUSED COMMUNITIES** – Communities that seek to see expressions of Christianity develop that are culturally relevant or authentic, thereby entering the world or culture of that people group.<sup>1</sup> Within Cru, this term references ministries where the focus is on winning, building and sending students and faculty from a certain ethnic background (e.g. Asian Americans, Hispanics and Latinos, etc.) through a defined movement such as Epic or Destino.

**ETHNICITY** – A common heritage belonging to a group of people distinguished from others through culture, common history, etc.

**ETHNIC MINORITY** – A group of people who differ in race or color or in national, religious, or cultural origin from the dominant group – often the majority population – of the country in which they live.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Gilmer, *A Cry Of Hope, A Call To Action: Unleashing the Next Generation of Black Christian Leaders*

**ETHNOCENTRISM** – An emotional attitude and belief system that maintains the superiority of one's own ethnic group or culture. Viewing life through one's own ethnic identity or the tendency to view other ethnicities or cultures from the perspective of one's own ethnicity and culture.

**IMPLICIT BIAS** – Biases a person holds of which he or she is unaware. Also known as unconscious bias.

**INSTITUTIONAL RACISM** – The use of, or participation within, established power structures and policies within a racialized society that, intentionally or unintentionally, formally or informally, disadvantage specific groups

**INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE** – The knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to interact in a meaningful way with people whose lives have been shaped by cultures different from one's own.

**MULTICULTURAL** – A ministry or church is considered multicultural if there is a diversity of leadership styles, communication styles, content, and values that are held and expressed. Multicultural tends towards experiential equity. Many people interchange the terms multiethnic and multicultural even if they are technically different.

**MULTIETHNIC** – Some would consider a ministry or church as multiethnic if no one ethnic group is more than 80% of the congregation. Multiethnic tends towards representative equity.

**PEOPLE OF COLOR** – Inclusive reference for people with visibly darker skin such as African Americans, Caribbean Americans, Asian Americans, Japanese, Koreans, Pakistanis, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, Latinos/Latinas. This term may not be preferred by everyone, therefore one should ask for preferences when possible.

**POWER** – The ability to influence change (positively or negatively). The dynamic between those from majority or dominant culture and those from minority or subdominant culture.

**PRIVILEGE** – Having systemic or inherited advantages in a society without earning them. Often has a positive association with power (meaning more power brings more privilege).

**RACE** – A socially constructed and socially empowered term used to identify a people group based on shared physical characteristics such as hair, eyes, skin color, body shape, etc.” The concept of race is not biologically supported but was adopted for social reasons to systematically stigmatize certain people groups as inferior, thus justifying racial slavery, injustice and inequality.

**RACISM** – The collective misuse of power that results in diminished life opportunities for some racial groups.<sup>2</sup> Racial prejudice plus power—the power of systems and institutions equals racism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 11

<sup>3</sup> *Ending Racism: Working for a Racism Free 21st Century*, Crossroads Ministry, 1996 (training video)

**RACIALIZED SOCIETY** – A society where race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.

**RECONCILIATION** – The restoring and healing process that grows out of God’s divine act, involving the continual practice of forgiveness, repentance and justice that transforms broken relationships, systems and structures into the way God intends them to be.<sup>4</sup>

**SYSTEMIC BIAS** – Bias that exists in the systems and structures that continually reinforce the status quo in terms of power and perception of norms.

### REFLECT AND RESPOND

Journal your thoughts as you have read through these definitions.

1. What were a few that were new to you or caught your attention?
2. Would you have defined these terms in the same way?
3. Have you had experiences where different opinions on the definition of one or more of these terms has created tension or confusion in conversation with someone else?

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<sup>4</sup> McNeil, Brenda Salter, ©2012