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## Privilege is an Attitude

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Figure 1: *BLM-PWR* by Karina Beltran

# Privilege is an Attitude

Jacey Falcone

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PRIVILEGE is defined as a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group. People of color, such as black people, are compelled to believe that the color of their skin is undesirable due to the stereotypes society has imposed on them. As a result, they are treated lesser than white people, who are at an advantage in society. Naturally, human beings evaluate everything that they come in contact with, leading to stereotypes. Such societal expectations are a widely held, oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or factor. Racial profiling, prejudice, and discrimination are some of the stereotypes that humans tend to use. Due to the never ending stereotypes about what the perfect person should be, humans are inclined to perceive some as better or lesser than others, based on the color of their skin or their appearance. They act on these thoughts and feelings, seeing them as normal due to the misguided perceptions of society.

Due to the skewed idea that appearance equates to status in society, some may have an advantage over others. As an example, fair skin color, light, straight hair, round eyes, narrow noses and thinner lips are all some of the common physical features found in white people. Many view these features as more desirable than those of other races, putting those others at an unfair disadvantage. In "Racial Healing" Dalton explains, "Part of the problem is that not all privileges are created equal. To quote McIntosh once again: "Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups." (26). It is important to recognize that white privilege exists. A recognition that doesn't silence the voices of those most affected by white privilege; one that does not ignore where it comes from, and why it has a staying power.

I believe that the majority of white people ignore their privilege because they have never had to face any discrimination. Dalton explains how being white is a birthright; already being born with a set of advantages most black people would not be able to have. As a white female myself, I have never had to face the challenges that nearly all black people have dealt with. I have never degraded due to the color of my skin, I have never had to worry about fearing for my

life because of my ethnicity, and I have never been left out because of my race. To further explain how white people don't recognize their privilege; Dalton explains how a white female named Jill had a sense of entitlement as stated in *Race Healing: Confronting the Fear Between Blacks and Whites*. "Her views of the risks associated with trespassing was not just neutral. It reflected a certain sense of entitlement, a belief that she has the right to go wherever she wants, and a confidence that she is welcome there. In other words, Jill's assessment of the situation was every bit as much as shaped by her WASP upbringing as mine was by growing up black and male" (25). I agree with Dalton's point; if the roles were reversed and a black male was caught trespassing, it wouldn't have gone over so smoothly. There would have been an uproar, and I am disheartened to know that Jill didn't even have to reconsider her actions because she automatically assumed she was welcomed.

The role of race in American lives plays a very significant role for most people. From what I have read, even America itself plays a huge part. Dalton mentions a scenario in his book about an American-born Indian woman by the name of Sydney Patel, who explains that she wasn't welcomed anywhere, "being too brown-skinned to be fully accepted as 'one of us' by the White kids" (Dalton 17). Sydney further explains that when she travelled to India, she wasn't accepted there either. "Much to Sydney's surprise, India's women's rights activists did not welcome her with open eyes. To them, she was first and foremost an over privileged American" (Dalton 19). Even though Sydney was Indian, the Indian women did not accept her because she was American, and to them, she was viewed as privileged. This resonated with me because it came to me as a shock. The different viewpoints interested me, how one side viewed her as too dark for their liking, and the other, too American. Instead of the Indian women viewing Sydney by the color of her skin, they viewed where she came from. This stuck with me mainly because of how others view privilege; some may view it by the color of skin, while others may view it as where you come from.

In other instances, some may believe poor white people have a disadvantage. In the article "Why Race Relations Got Worse: The Racial Conversation We're Having Is Tribalistic" by J.D. Vance, "A drug that is for so long was associated with the inner-city ghettos, became the cultural inheritance of the southern and Appalachian

white: White youths died from heroin significantly more often than their peers of other ethnicities [...]. No other ethnic group expressed such alarming pessimism about its economic" (10). Although not all white people may have high privileges, I do not see how white people have more alarming pessimism compared to other ethnic groups. For example, "Trump's policies, such as they are, offer little substance to those suffering from addiction, joblessness and downward mobility. And the Black Lives movement, focused primarily on police violence, cannot alone address the full spectrum of problems faced by the lack underclass" (Vance 25). Both groups and/or policies are in need of reform, as they are more focused on one single issue instead of all. In "Why Race Got Worse," Vance highlighted a point that is happening in today's society- the Black Lives Matter movement shows the fear that people of color have to face. They are expressing how they are feeling and standing up for themselves, fighting to be seen and treated as equal. Another key factor that ties in with what Vance says is what Coates states in "What We Mean When We Say 'Race is a Social Construct'". "Race" writes the great historian Nell Irvin Painter "is an idea not a fact." Indeed, Race does not need biology. Race only requires some good guys with big guns looking for a reason" (Coates 17). Before, we made it more about biology, when that is not always the case. Racial classifications are not free of consequence or tangible effects.

Based on the amount of racial inequalities that people of color are still battling, it is evident that society is in dire need of reform. By suspending our disbelief and ignorance and being able to see out each person as an individual rather than through the eyes of a preconceived stereotype, there could be a change that evolves. As a result, resolution on the community and societal levels can occur, rather than a habit of fear or superiority.

## Author Bio

Jacey Falcone is a student at CSUMB. Growing up, she has always enjoyed expressing herself through creative outlets as well as absorbing new knowledge and perspectives through media. She enjoys reading both fiction and nonfiction stories and is fascinated by how themes expressed through written works can often represent real-world issues. There is truth within literature, and through reading and studying these works, one can reach a further understanding of how media reflects the possibilities of what the world has to offer. This essay was written as part of a first-year composition course.

## Artist's Statement

### ***BLM PWR* by Karina Beltran**

An inside look of the BLM movement in Salinas, California. The strength and the power of the crowd is a message to how serious we take the matter. We are not alone, in fact, we are together as one.

## Works Cited

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