

Module 1 Key Terminology

Human Rights: aspects of social, political, and economic life that you are entitled to by virtue of being alive. Human rights are supposed to be universally guaranteed to all humans. See [the UN Declaration of Human Rights](#) for more information.

- Right to healthcare
- Right to an education
- Right to marry and have children
- Right to immigrate and emigrate

Civil Rights: aspects of social, political, and economic life that you are entitled to by virtue of being a citizen or member of a particular community. See the [US Constitution and Amendments](#) for more information.

- Right to free speech
- Right to protest
- Right to free religious practice
- Right to vote

Use of Language

The language we use to describe people matters. It takes just a few seconds to either validate a person's existence or be cruel to them. Please choose your words with kindness and be aware that language changes over time.

It's important to understand how we use language to make people feel like an "other" or an outsider, even when we don't mean to. [THIS VIDEO](#) demonstrates how language can be unintentionally hurtful.

Language about Race: Below are some helpful terms to use when talking about race. The intent in this list is not to offer an inclusive or exclusive list of people who exist; rather, the goal is to give us a starter set of common terminology we will be using in this course.

Racism: a pattern of beliefs and behaviors shared by a whole culture that privileges people with one race or ethnicity over another. In the case of white supremacy, all of the institutions (e.g. schools, banks, political structures) are set up to benefit white people and to exclude everyone else. This is so ingrained into us that it's difficult to see it happening.

Racist: a person is not racist. A person's thoughts, actions, or behaviors may contribute to racism or white supremacy.

Marginalized people: this term describes people who are pushed to the cultural margins of society.

Minoritized people: this term is important in describing the way a culture labels people as minorities and establishes hierarchies based on those labels. Using the term "minoritized people" instead of "minorities" recognizes the fact that oppression isn't just about numbers: there could be more Black or Latinx people than white people in a region, but that culture and economy could still be shaped by white supremacist ideology. Similarly, there could be more LGBTQ+ people than straight and cisgender people in a community, but the dominant culture still features movies, TV shows, and books about straight and cisgender people.

White People: Racial classification of people with white- or peach-colored skin, often, though by no means always, of European descent.

Black People: Racial classification of people with dark brown skin, often, though by no means always, of African descent. Some, though not all, Black Americans prefer this term over African American. It is generally used in recognition of the fact that not all African people are Black, and not all Black people are African.

African American: this term has been widely accepted in the US as an appropriate and polite way to describe Black Americans. However, recently the term is being called into question for its lack of inclusion (see above).

Latinx: this term is accepted as a non-gendered form of Latino/a to indicate people of Latin American heritage.

Chicanx: this term is accepted as a non-gendered form of Chicano/a to indicate people of Mexican American heritage

Indigenous People: this term is sometimes preferred over Native American to refer to people of indigenous tribes. When possible, though, it's best to describe an Indigenous person using their actual tribal affiliation or heritage, e.g. Sioux, First Nation, Inuit, etc.

People of Color: this term is variously used today to describe all non-white people. It is preferable to either "negro" or "colored," because it uses person-first language; however, it's important to note the harmfulness of lumping all marginalized or minoritized people together. Many people prefer to be identified by their country heritage, such as Japanese American or Pakistani American, though this also differs by person. When in doubt, follow the person's lead—it's their identity after all, and often there is no reason to discuss a person's racial or ethnic identity at all unless they initiate the conversation.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. This term has recently come into use to recognize and validate differences between these three identity/heritage/cultural groups, rather than lumping everyone together under the term People of Color.

Negro: You will come across this word throughout the historical documents we examine here. This term was widely considered to be an appropriate way to describe Black people through the 1980s. It is now considered offensive, so please refrain from using it except where directly quoting historical documents.

Colored: You will come across this word throughout the historical documents we examine here. This term was widely used through the 1960s to indicate people who were not white. Today, the term is widely considered inappropriate because: A) white is also a color, not the default setting for humans against which "colored" people are compared; B) the term People of Color puts the person first, rather than the skin color.

The N Word: This term was used by white slaveholders as a racial slur and means of dehumanizing enslaved people. Today, it is considered not only inappropriate but extremely offensive, because it recalls the dehumanization of slavery. Some Black Americans do still use it as a way of reclaiming power over the term; this is called reappropriation—when a minoritized group uses words that have been considered slurs against them in order to reclaim the language and, therefore, the power of

language. If you need to quote a text that uses the N word, please use asterisks in place of the letters: n*****.

Language about Gender Below are some helpful terms to use when talking about gender. As with terminology related to race, the intent in this list is not to offer an inclusive or exclusive list of people who exist; rather, the goal is to give us a starter set of common terminology we will be using in this course.

Women or girls: This is the preferred term over “female” because it describes an identity, not a biological category.

Men or boys: This is the preferred term over “male” because it describes an identity, not a biological category.

Nonbinary people: please be aware that not all people identify as a man or a woman. Some people identify as nonbinary or GNC (Gender Non-Conforming).

We will discuss many more terms this semester, but these will get us started. When in doubt, be as specific and respectful as you can in describing people. If you use the wrong term, apologize, listen, and be prepared to avoid doing so again.