race-related coverage

Reporting and writing about issues involving race calls for thoughtful consideration, precise language, and discussions with others of diverse backgrounds whenever possible about how to frame coverage or what language is most appropriate, accurate and fair.

Avoid broad generalizations and labels; race and ethnicity are one part of a person's identity. Identifying people by race and reporting on actions that have to do with race often go beyond simple style questions, challenging journalists to think broadly about racial issues before having to make decisions on specific situations and stories.

In all coverage — not just race-related coverage — strive to accurately represent the world, or a particular community, and its diversity through the people you quote and depict in all formats. Omissions and lack of inclusion can render people invisible.

Be aware that some words and phrases that seem innocuous to one group can carry negative connotations, even be seen as slurs, to another. As with all news coverage, be sensitive to your varied audiences and their different perceptions of language and the larger world.

For instance, many people see *thug* as code for a racial slur; *Black boy* has a loaded history and should be avoided in referring to Black males of any age; *unarmed Black man* could be seen as assuming the default is for Black men to be armed.

Do not write in a way that assumes *white* is default. Not: *The officer is accused of choking Owens, who is Black*. Instead: *The white officer is accused of choking Owens, who is Black*. Some guidelines:

race Consider carefully when deciding whether to identify people by race. Often, it is an irrelevant factor and drawing unnecessary attention to someone's race or ethnicity can be interpreted as bigotry. There are, however, occasions when race is pertinent:
In stories that involve significant, groundbreaking or historic events, such as being elected U.S. president, being named to the U.S. Supreme Court or other notable occurrences. *Barack Obama was the first Black U.S. president. Sonia Sotomayor is the first Hispanic justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Jeremy Lin is the first American-born NBA player of Chinese or Taiwanese descent.*

In cases where suspects or missing persons are being sought, and the descriptions provided are detailed and not solely racial. Any racial reference should be removed when the individual is apprehended or found.

When reporting a demonstration, disturbance or other conflict involving race (including verbal conflicts), or issues like civil rights.

In other situations when race is an issue, use news judgment. Include racial or ethnic details only when they are clearly relevant and that relevance is explicit in the story.

Do not use a derogatory term except in rare circumstances — when it is crucial to the story or the understanding of a news event. Flag the contents in an editor's note.

racist, racism Racism is a doctrine asserting racial differences in character, intelligence, etc., and the superiority of one race over another, or racial discrimination or feelings of hatred or bigotry toward people of another race.

The terms *systemic racism, structural racism* and *institutional racism* refer to social, political and institutional systems and cultures that contribute to racial inequality in areas such as employment, health care, housing, the criminal justice system and education. Avoid shortening this use to simply *racism*, to avoid confusion with the other definition.

Some use the term *racist* to refer to anyone who benefits from *systemic racism* and doesn't actively work to dismantle it. Avoid this use unless essential in a direct quotation; if used, explain it.

Deciding whether a specific statement, action, policy, etc., should be termed *racist*, or characterized in a different way, often is not clear-cut. Such decisions should include discussion with colleagues and/or others from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. At the AP, that conversation should also include senior managers.

Begin by assessing the facts: Does the statement, action, policy, etc., meet the definition of *racism*? That assessment need not involve examining the motivation of the person who spoke or acted, which is a separate issue that may not be related to how the statement or action itself can be characterized.

In general, avoid using *racist* or any other label as a noun for a person; it's far harder to match the complexity of a person to a definition or label than it is a statement or action. Instead, be specific in describing the person's words or actions. Again, discuss with senior managers, colleagues and others from diverse backgrounds when the description may be appropriate for a person.

Cases in which the term *racist* might be used include identifying as racist support for avowed racist organizations, statements calling another race or ethnic group inferior, or employing negative stereotypes for different racial or ethnic groups. *The video shows the candidate wearing blackface and making racist statements including, "You're not white so you can't be right."*

If *racist* is not the appropriate term, give careful thought to how best to describe the situation. Depending on the specifics of what was said or done, alternatives may include *xenophobic, bigoted, biased, nativist, racially divisive*, or in some cases, simply *racial*.

Avoid *racially charged, racially motivated* or *racially tinged*, euphemisms which convey little meaning.

Always provide specifics to describe the words or actions in question; using a broad and descriptive term such as racist requires supporting details and context. In doing so, avoid repeating derogatory terms except in the rare circumstances when it is crucial to the story or the understanding of a news event.

Provide context and historical perspective when appropriate to help convey the impact or implications of the words or actions. For example, a story about a candidate wearing blackface should include context about performers in the 1800s who darkened their faces to create bigoted caricatures of Black people. A story about comments that certain members of Congress should "go back" to their "broken and crime-infested" countries should include the context that "go back to where you came from" is a racist insult aimed for decades at immigrants and African Americans in the United States.

See **racially charged, racially motivated, racially tinged**, and other entries in **race-related coverage**.

racially charged, racially motivated, racially tinged Avoid using these vague phrases to describe situations in which race is or is alleged or perceived to be a central issue, but that do not meet the definition of *racist* or *racism*. As alternatives, terms including *xenophobic, bigoted, biased, nativist* or *racially divisive* may be clearer, depending on the context. In some cases, the term *racial* is appropriate: *racial arguments, racial tensions, racial injustice*. Always give specifics about what was done, said or alleged.

Do not use euphemisms for racist or racism when the latter terms are truly applicable. *Mississippi has a history of racist lynchings*, not *a history of racially motivated lynchings. He is charged in the racist massacre of nine people at a Black church*, not *the racially motivated massacre of nine people at a Black church*. See **racist, racism**, and other entries in **race-related coverage**.

Black(s), white(s) (n.) Do not use either term as a singular noun. For plurals, phrasing such as *Black people, white people, Black teachers, white students* is often preferable when clearly relevant. *White officers account for 64% of the police force, Black officers 21% and Latino officers 15%. The gunman targeted Black churchgoers.* The plural nouns *Blacks* and *whites* are generally acceptable when clearly relevant and needed for reasons of space or sentence construction. *He helped integrate dance halls among Blacks, whites, Latinos and Asian Americans. Black* and *white* are acceptable as adjectives when relevant.

Black (adj.) Use the capitalized term as an adjective in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense: *Black people, Black culture, Black literature, Black studies, Black colleges*.

African American is also acceptable for those in the U.S. The terms are not necessarily interchangeable. Americans of Caribbean heritage, for example, generally refer to themselves as *Caribbean American*. Follow an individual's preference if known, and be specific when possible and relevant. *Minneapolis has a large Somali American population because of refugee resettlement. The author is Senegalese American.*

Use of the capitalized *Black* recognizes that language has evolved, along with the common understanding that especially in the United States, the term reflects a shared identity and culture rather than a skin color alone.

Also use *Black* in racial, ethnic and cultural differences outside the U.S. to avoid equating a person with a skin color.

Use *Negro* or *colored* only in names of organizations or in rare quotations when essential.

See **obscenities, profanities, vulgarities**.

boy, girl Generally acceptable to describe males or females younger than 18. While it is always inaccurate to call people under 18 men or women and people 18 and older *boys* or *girls*, be aware of nuances and unintentional implications. Referring to Black males of any age and in any context as *boys*, for instance, can be perceived as demeaning and call to mind historical language used by some to address Black men. Be specific about ages if possible, or refer to *Black youths, child, teen* or similar.

dual heritage No hyphen (a change in 2019 from previous style) for terms such as *African American, Asian American* and *Filipino American*, used when relevant to refer to an American person's heritage. The terms are less common when used to describe non-Americans, but may be used when relevant: *Turkish German* for a German of Turkish descent.

African American No hyphen (a change in 2019 for this and other dual heritage terms). Acceptable for an American Black person of African descent. The terms are not necessarily interchangeable. Americans of Caribbean heritage, for example, generally refer to themselves as *Caribbean American*. Follow a person's preference.

Asian American No hyphen (a change in 2019 for this and other dual heritage terms). Acceptable for an American of Asian descent. When possible, refer to a person's country of origin or follow the person's preference. For example: *Filipino American* or *Indian American*.
brown (adj.) Avoid this broad and imprecise term in racial, ethnic or cultural references unless as part of a direct quotation. Interpretations of what the term includes vary widely.

COMPOUND PROPER NOUNS AND ADJECTIVES: No hyphen in designating dual heritage: *Italian American, Mexican American* (a change in 2019).

Caucasian Avoid as a synonym for *white*, unless in a quotation.

POC, BIPOC, BAME See **people of color**.

people of color The term is acceptable when necessary in broad references to multiple races other than white: *We will hire more people of color. Nine playwrights of color collaborated on the script*.

Be aware, however, that many people of various races object to the term for various reasons, including that it lumps together into one monolithic group anyone who isn't white.

Be specific whenever possible by referring to, for instance, *Black Americans, Chinese Americans* or *members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida*. Examples: *The poll found that Black and Latino Americans are bearing the brunt of the pandemic's financial impact*, not *people of color are bearing the brunt of the pandemic's financial impact. Most of the magazine's readers are Black women*, not *most of the magazine's readers are women of color*.

In some cases, other wording may be appropriate. Examples: *people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds; diverse groups; various heritages; different cultures*.

Do not use *person of color* for an individual.

Do not use the term *Black, Indigenous and people of color*, which some see as more inclusive by distinguishing the experiences of Black and Indigenous people but others see as less inclusive by diminishing the experiences of everyone else. Similarly, do not use the term *Black, Asian and minority ethnic*.

Do not use the shorthand *POC, BIPOC* or *BAME* unless necessary in a direct quotation; when used, explain it.

minority, racial minority The term is acceptable as an adjective in broad references to multiple races other than white in the United States: *We will hire more members of minority groups*. Be sure the term is accurate in each circumstance, since what constitutes a racial minority varies by location.

Be specific whenever possible by referring to, for instance, *Black Americans, Chinese Americans* or *members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida*. Examples: *The poll found that Black and Latino Americans are bearing the brunt of the pandemic's financial impact, not minorities are bearing the brunt of the pandemic's financial impact. Most of the magazine's readers are Black women, not most of the magazine's readers are minority women*.

Do not use *minority* as a noun in the singular. The plural *minorities* is acceptable when needed for reasons of space or sentence construction. But phrasing such as *minority students* or *minority communities* is preferable.

Black Lives Matter, #BlackLivesMatter A global movement launched after the 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin with a goal to eradicate systemic racism and white supremacy and to oppose violence committed against Black people. Either *Black Lives Matter* as a noun or *the Black Lives Matter movement* is acceptable. *BLM* is acceptable on second reference. Although there are many groups that use "Black Lives Matter" or "BLM" in their names, only 16 are considered affiliates of the *Black Lives Matter Global Network*. *The Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation*, which provides organizational infrastructure and funding to the affiliate chapters, was founded in 2014 after what is known as the Ferguson uprising over the August 2014 police shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. *The BLM network* is acceptable on second reference.

Some respond to the Black Lives Matter movement by saying "all lives matter" or "blue lives matter," the latter in reference to police officers. Neither is a formal movement, so lowercase and enclose in quotes.

slaves, enslaved people The term slaves denotes an inherent identity of a person or people treated as chattel or property. The term *enslaved people* underlines that the slave status has been imposed on individuals. Many prefer the term *enslaved person/people* to separate people's identity from their circumstances. Others prefer the term slave as a way to make a point of the circumstances. Either term is acceptable. Try to determine an individual's preference.

Juneteenth June 19, the traditional commemoration date of the emancipation of enslaved people in the United States. The holiday also has been called *Juneteenth Independence Day* or *Freedom Day*. President Abraham Lincoln first issued the Emancipation Proclamation declaring all slaves free in Confederate territory on Sept. 22, 1862, but the news took time to travel. June 19, 1865, is the date when word of the proclamation reached African Americans in Texas.

biracial, multiracial Acceptable, when clearly relevant, to describe people with more than one racial heritage. Usually more useful when describing large, diverse groups of people than individuals. Avoid *mixed-race*, which can carry negative connotations, unless a story subject prefers the term. Be specific if possible, and then use biracial for people of two heritages or multiracial for those of two or more on subsequent references if needed. Examples: *She has an African American father and a white mother* instead of *She is biracial*. But: *The study of biracial people showed a split in support along gender lines. Multiracial* can encompass people of any combination of races.

transracial The term should not be used to describe people who have adopted a different racial identity.

Chicano A term that Mexican Americans in the U.S. Southwest sometimes use to describe their heritage. Use only if it is a person's preference.

Latino, Latina *Latino* is often the preferred noun or adjective for a person from, or whose ancestors were from, a Spanish-speaking land or culture or from Latin America. *Latina* is the feminine form. Some prefer the recently coined gender-neutral term *Latinx*, which should be confined to quotations, names of organizations or descriptions of individuals who request it and should be accompanied by a short explanation. *Hernandez prefers the gender-neutral term Latinx.* For groups of females, use the plural *Latinas*; for groups of males or of mixed gender, use the plural *Latinos*. *Hispanics* is also generally acceptable for those in the U.S. Use a more specific identification when possible, such as *Cuban, Puerto Rican, Brazilian* or *Mexican American*.

Hispanic A person from — or whose ancestors were from — a Spanish-speaking land or culture. *Latino, Latina* or *Latinx* are sometimes preferred. Follow the person's preference. Use a more specific identification when possible, such as *Cuban, Puerto Rican* or *Mexican American*.

American Indians, Native Americans Both are acceptable terms in general references for those in the U.S. when referring to two or more people of different tribal affiliations. For individuals, use the name of the tribe; if that information is not immediately available, try to obtain it. *He is a Navajo commissioner. She is a member of the Nisqually Indian Tribe. He is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.*Some tribes and tribal nations use *member*; others use *citizen*. If in doubt, use *citizen*. Avoid words such as wampum, warpath, powwow, teepee, brave, squaw, etc., which can be disparaging and offensive. In Alaska, the Indigenous groups are collectively known as Alaska Natives.

First Nation is the preferred term for native tribes in Canada.

Indian is used to describe the peoples and cultures of the South Asian nation of India. Do not use the term as a shorthand for *American Indians*.

tribe Refers to a sovereign political entity, communities sharing a common ancestry, culture or language, and a social group of linked families who may be part of an ethnic group. Capitalize the word tribe when part of a formal name of sovereign political entities, or communities sharing a common ancestry, culture or language. Identify tribes by the political identity specified by the tribe, nation or community: *the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, the Cherokee Nation*. The term *ethnic group* is preferred when referring to ethnicity or ethnic violence.

Orient, Oriental Do not use when referring to East Asian nations and their peoples. *Asian* is the acceptable term for an inhabitant of those regions.

Indigenous (adj.) Capitalize this term used to refer to original inhabitants of a place. *Aboriginal leaders welcomed a new era of Indigenous relations in Australia. Bolivia's Indigenous peoples represent some 62% of the population.*

Aborigine An outdated term referring to aboriginal people in Australia. It is considered offensive by some and should be avoided.

ghetto, ghettos Do not use indiscriminately as a synonym for the sections of cities inhabited by minorities or poor people. *Ghetto* has a connotation that government decree has forced people to live in a certain area.

In most cases, *section, district, slum area* or *quarter* is the more accurate word.

reverse discrimination A term sometimes used to describe bias or perceived bias against majority groups. Limit its use to quotes; generally just *discrimination* will suffice to describe such allegations or practices.