

## 12. White Privilege II

Seattle rapper Ben Haggerty, aka Macklemore, is a popular white rapper. In his 2005 song “White Privilege,” he raps about how being white is an advantage in the music industry. In 2016, Macklemore collaborated with Chicago singer Jamila Woods to release the sequel, “White Privilege II.” The first verse depicts his experience at a protest over the Ferguson grand jury decision not to indict police officer Darren Wilson over the shooting death of Michael Brown.<sup>1</sup> He asks, “Is it my place to give my two cents? Or should I stand on the side and shut my mouth?”<sup>2</sup> This question has multiple dimensions. First, should Macklemore get involved in anti-racist activism in general, and in the Black Lives Matter movement in particular? And if so, what kind of role should he play?

First, should Macklemore get involved at all? On one hand, we might think that he should, since he benefits from being a white person in hip hop, and he has a platform that he can use to reach a wide audience with important messages. Thus, we might think, Macklemore has a moral obligation to advocate against racism, and to do so in consultation with organizations such as Black Lives Matter. On the other hand, we might think that Macklemore does not have a moral obligation to get involved with any particular cause or with any particular organization. Sure, he should support good causes in general. But he should also be free to choose which causes he supports, rather than having a stronger obligation to support some causes than others because of his identity or his chosen line of work.

Second, if Macklemore does get involved, what kind of role should he play? On one hand, we might think that recording songs like White Privilege II is a good thing for him to do, because it allows him to draw mainstream attention to issues that might otherwise remain marginalized. On the other hand, we might think that recording this kind of song is a bad thing for him to do, because it centers his perspective as a white person and allows him to benefit from his participation in anti-racist activism. Indeed, even Macklemore expressed conflict about releasing this song, claiming in an interview, “I had to continue to come back to, ‘Is this record, with all of the inherent flaws in it, ... better in the world, or not?’ And I couldn’t answer that just by myself.”<sup>3</sup>

### Study Questions:

1. If a person benefits from a certain system of oppression, do those benefits provide them with a stronger obligation to advocate around that issue than they would otherwise have? Why or why not?
2. If a person has a platform they can use to reach a wide audience, does that platform provide them with a stronger obligation to advocate around certain issues than they would otherwise have? Why or why not?
3. What kind of role should white people play in anti-racist activism? What forms of participation are helpful, what forms of participation are harmful, and why?

1. <http://www.npr.org/2016/01/29/464707970/-this-song-is-uncomfortable-macklemore-on-the-contradictions-of-white-privilege>
2. <http://genius.com/8557356>
3. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/4-things-macklemore-told-us-about-white-privilege-ii-20160125>