GLOSSARY of RACIAL JUSTICE TERMS

Language and terms can be powerful tools to discuss race, power, and privilege. By using terminology preferred or created by a marginalized community, we celebrate their dignity and leadership. But language is not static; it constantly evolves as we grow and change. It is part of the responsibility of people in solidarity with marginalized communities to keep up with those changes.

Here is a list of terms and definitions that you might find useful as you discuss racial justice. This glossary is by no means complete. Rather, it should be used to make sure that everyone is grounded in the same language and can fully participate in the conversation.

EQUALITY
Everyone gets the same distribution of the resource(s) or is treated in the same way under the law or by institutions, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or other social identities.

EQUITY
Individuals and communities get the resources they need to succeed as well as support and protection from the law and institutions based on the historical and current oppressions they face because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or other social identities.

ALLY
A person who actively supports and advocates for people who belong to marginalized, silenced, or less privileged groups without actually being a member of those groups. This person will often challenge or confront systems of oppression. Allyship should be approached as a continuous process of standing with and following the leadership of oppressed groups as they fight for justice and dignity.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION
When someone uses a tradition, ritual, attire, or other aspect of a culture that has been undermined and demeaned as “unworthy” of accolades or study by the dominant culture in a society and whose people has been systemically and historically denied rights and dignity. The act of adopting such a piece of this culture becomes tied to the larger history of delegitimizing and erasing the people and their culture.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM
When prejudices around race, particularly the inferiority of People of Color, are structured into the social and economic institutions in society. Institutional racism occurs when organizations, businesses, or institutions like schools and police departments, discriminate, either deliberately or indirectly, against certain groups of people to limit their rights because of their race.
INTERSECTIONALITY
Kimberle Williams Crenshaw coined this term to describe the lived experience in which an individual’s multiple social identities (race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, etc.) intersect and interact, informing the way in which individuals simultaneously experience oppression and privilege in their daily lives interpersonally and systemically. For example, all women are impacted by sexism, but a transgender woman of color has a different experience of sexism than a white cisgender woman because the sexism she experiences is intersected with racism and transphobia.

JEWS OF COLOR (JOC)
Jews who are People of Color (see definition for People of Color).

MULTIRACIAL / MULTIETHNIC JEWISH COMMUNITY
Jewish communities around the world developed rituals, traditions, food, and prayer in relation to local culture and community. While the image of “a Jew” is often tied to whiteness in mainstream US culture, there are multiracial and multiethnic Jewish communities in the US and global Jewish communities in places like India, China, Ethiopia, Kurdistan, and Yemen. The terms Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Sephardi designate the ethnic and cultural background of a Jewish person or community. These include the following communities and the locations they trace their roots to:

- Mizrahi Jews - the Middle East
- Sephardi Jews - Spain and the Spanish diaspora
- Ashkenazi Jews - Central and Eastern Europe
- Ethiopian Jews - Ethiopia

There is a wide diversity of practice and identities in these communities; some Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews identify themselves as Jews of Color and others do not (and further reject the title Mizrahi). Some Jews of Color identify, either by marriage or custom, as Ashkenazi or Sephardi, but may not necessarily originate from Eastern Europe or Spain or the Spanish diaspora.

PEOPLE OF COLOR (POC)
People, comprised of a diversity of racial identities, who are not included in the United States’ normative and privileged definition of “white;” a term to describe people with racial identities who face systematic oppression in the U.S. Those identities can include: Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Pacific Islander, although not all people with those identities will self-describe as People of Color or fit in those clear racial binaries.

PRIVILEGE
Unearned advantages that systematically empower certain groups in our society over others; a right that only some people have access or availability to because of their social group memberships.

RACE
A social and political construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, and ethnic classification.

RACIAL JUSTICE
The struggle for equitable outcomes for people of color; a wide range of ways in which groups and individuals struggle to change laws, policies, practices, and ideas that reinforce and perpetuate racial disparities.