Language and terms can be powerful tools to discuss race, power, and privilege. By using terminology preferred or created by a community directly impacted by injustice, one celebrates their dignity and leadership. But language is not static; it constantly evolves as individuals and society grow and change. In addition, changes can happen slowly or quickly, and they can be universally supported from within a particular community or disputed. It is part of the responsibility of people in solidarity with marginalized communities to lean into the evolving nature of language.

Here is a list of terms and language that you will find in our resources and might hear others use or find useful as you discuss racial justice. This glossary is by no means complete. Rather, it should be used to make sure that everyone understands what the other means in conversation. We are all learners in this space and it is likely that some people may use language in ways that may be different from what you think the words mean or how our glossary below defines them. We encourage you to ask for clarity about someone might mean by language rather than making an assumption so you can both fully participate in the conversation.

As you go through this living document, we invite you to circle, highlight or star definitions that:

• Resonate with you
• Challenge you
• Teach you something new
• You want to understand better
• All of the above!

ALLY
Someone 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.

CISGENDER
A term for a person or persons whose experiences of their own gender agree with the sex they were assigned at birth. The term also relates to an idea of privilege and an accountability because people who are cis don’t have to “come out” as such, it is just presumed that they are. For example, a woman who was identified at birth as female and who defines herself as female in her day to day life would call herself a cis-gender woman (or female).

1 Solidarity vs. “Performance Allyship” is a topic that many activists have written about. We encourage you to reference some of the resources here: “Allyship,” The Anti-Oppression Network; “How to Tell the Difference Between Real Solidarity and ‘Ally Theater,’” Black Girl Dangerous; and “On Allyship and Performative Wokeness,” Eric Peterson.
GLOSSARY of RACIAL JUSTICE TERMS

INTERSECTIONALITY
Kimberle Williams Crenshaw coined this term to describe the lived experience in which an individual’s multiple marginalized identities (race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, etc.) intersect and interact, informing the way in which individuals simultaneously experience different forms of oppression 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)
Jewish People of Color (see definition for People of Color).

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, class, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or other social identities.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM
A kind of racism that is driven through the impact of and expressed by a larger system. It occurs when prejudices around race, particularly the idea of racial inferiority of People of Color, are structured into the social and economic institutions in society. Institutional racism occurs when organizations, businesses, systems like education, health care, housing, judiciary, and food disproportionately disadvantage and exclude People of Color. Institutional racism is the result of a long history of racially distributed resources and ideas that shape our view of ourselves and others. Institutional racism is extremely difficult to change, because it is a hierarchical system that comes with a broad range of policies and institutions that keep it in place. Because of this hierarchical system, without knowing it, many people contribute to or perpetuate institutional racism.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION
A term coined by sociologists in 1990, Oxford defines cultural appropriation as the unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society. Particular power dynamic in which members of a dominant culture take elements from a culture of people who have been systematically oppressed by that dominant group. For example; themed parties that exoticize other cultures, wearing traditionally black hairstyles and being deemed ‘trendy’, wearing Native American headdresses to music festivals, etc.

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, class, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or other social identities.

Cultural Appropriation
Definition and Analysis of Institutionalized Racism,” Solid Ground.


Gratitude to the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable’s Racial Equity Advisory Group for contributing to and approving this definition.
MULTIRACIAL / MULTIETHNIC JEWISH COMMUNITY

While the image of “a Jew” is often tied to whiteness in mainstream US culture, there were and continue to be Jewish communities traditions that vary from that of the “normative” American Jewish experience. There are diverse domestic and global Jewish communities in Mexico, Iran, India, China, Ethiopia, Kurdistan, Uganda, and Yemen to name a few, each with its own rituals, traditions, foods, and prayer customs.

The terms Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Sephardi designate the ethnic and cultural background of a Jewish person or community based on ethnic and/or cultural origin. For example:

- **Mizrahi Jews** trace their roots to the Middle East
- **Sephardi Jews** trace their roots to Spain and Spanish diaspora
- **Ashkenazi Jews** trace their roots Central and Eastern Europe
- **Beta Israel** trace their roots to Ethiopia
- **Cochin Jews** trace their roots to India
- **Kaifeng Jews** trace their roots to China

While there is a wide diversity of ethnicity, practice, and identities in these communities, and other communities we’ve not mentioned, some Jews do not see themselves or identify within the normative U.S distinctions of Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Mizrahi. Even more, there are some Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews who identify as Jews of Color and others that do not (and further reject the title Mizrahi). Some Jews of Color identify as Ashkenazi or Sephardi but may not necessarily originate from Eastern Europe or the Spanish diaspora.

PEOPLE OF COLOR (POC)

People, comprised of a variety 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. 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 race, class, or other 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.

SOLIDARITY

Following the leadership, amplifying the stories, and standing with people who are directly impacted by an issue. This can come in many forms, but it is always deeply rooted in actions that are accountable to and in relationship with people and communities who experience oppression and injustice, and therefore best know the strengths and needs of their communities to address them. Because we hold multiple and intersectional identities at different times, and in different situations, one will need, and have to act, in solidarity to create a more just world. Therefore, solidarity is clarity around a shared goal of collective liberation and building relationships to work together through the challenges.

TRANSGENDER

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms - including transgender. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation.

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5 | Ibid
6 | Check out “10 Tips for Showing Up in Solidarity,” Amnesty International and CAIR.
7 | Definition adapted from GLAAD Media Reference Guide and Human Rights Campaign’s Terminology and Definitions.
**WHITE JEWS**
People who are Jewish and white (see definition for white people). Or white people who are Jews.

**WHITE PEOPLE**
People who are included in the United States’ normative and privileged definition of “white”. Typically of European descent. Generally, do not have a lived experience of how the privilege of their own race operates in the world.

**WHITENESS**
While “white” is a social and political construct of race referring to white-skinned people that nonetheless has life-changing consequences, “whiteness” is a social construction, behavior, ideology, and system that embraces white culture, experiences, and appearances as the norm and relegates all else as “the other” through explicit and implicit violence. In order to maintain white European supremacy, “whiteness” expands and contracts to give different communities and identities access to privileges, rights, opportunity, and power in society. Whiteness is often invisible for those within it, and suffocating or erasing for those outside. 8

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**WHITE SUPREMACY**
A term that has been used more recently in the public sphere, that frankly is the most often misunderstood, disputed and uncomfortable for many individuals. White Supremacy usually refers to the overwhelming effects of white cultural power at the systemic and institutional level. It is difficult for some, but critical to distinguish the difference in the meaning of “white supremacist” - individuals who affiliate with racists causes to protect or promote the power of white people and to strip power from others- and “white supremacy” a sociological phenomenon (ie a set of external forces that influence our behaviors and opinions).

According to legal scholar, Frances Lee Ansley, 9 white supremacy is, “a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, [and] conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread...White supremacy is the system of oppression that empowers white people at the expense of People of Color.” 10 As the Racial Equity Tools states, this historically based system of exploitation is, “for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.” 11

The dynamic of whiteness as being superior, and all other races as being denied humanity and dignity, particularly Blackness, occurs explicitly and implicitly on an everyday basis through interpersonal interactions and institutions. Racism, anti-semitism, transphobia, Islamophobia, and other forms of systemic oppression are the branches that uphold white supremacy. We are all swimming in this system and drinking its air simply from growing up within our society.

**REFLECTION MOMENT:** This term can trigger a range of reactions and emotions for people. If reading or hearing the term “white supremacy” has sparked a negative or visceral reaction, please reread the definition of “white supremacy” and discuss the following questions with a trusted friend or reflect through journaling. **Why this particular ask?** Whether we want to be or not, we are a part of systems that we have very little to do with setting up, but we can be a critical part of perpetuating. Let’s engage with this knowledge instead of ignoring it. For some, this may be new; for others, they know this deep in their bodies and hearts. For some, it’s a choice of whether or not to engage; for others it’s a lived reality. Together, let’s embark on continuous spiral of learning, action and reflection.

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Use the following questions to lean into the productive discomfort and the questions that might be underneath it:

1. What was your reaction (emotional, intellectual, or physical) to reading the phrase “white supremacy”?
2. What questions do you have about the definition? What is new to you and what builds upon your knowledge?
3. How does it resonate with or challenge how you understand the way in which injustice operates?
4. How might the phrase “white supremacy” make it easier to discuss cultural power imbalances? How might the phrase make those discussions harder?
5. What are the way your life might be impacted (either benefited or harmed) by “white supremacy”?

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8 | Definition is indebted to “Understanding Whiteness,” Calgary Anti-Racism Coalition and Paul Kivel.

9 | Frances Lee Ansley was a legal scholar who published, “Stirring the Ashes: Race, Class and the Future of Civil Rights Scholarship,” in the 1989 Cornell Law Review. His definition of white supremacy is widely used in critical race theory.
