

## Glossary of Terms & Acronyms

This living document was compiled by the White People 4 Black Lives Class Committee as an act of love and commitment to making our spaces and our language more accessible. Our Communication Guidelines for a Brave Space include an encouragement to “Break it Down-Use simple language and background information when necessary, and ask for clarification if needed.” While we certainly want to continue to encourage folks to do this, we also want to acknowledge that it may be difficult for some folks to ask for clarification (especially folks who are newer to racial justice work). This document provides definitions for words, terms, and acronyms that are used often in our spaces. We want this to be a crowdsourced document, and as such encourage feedback and welcome suggestions for terms to add. Please email Christine ([cgatsonmichalak@gmail.com](mailto:cgatsonmichalak@gmail.com)) or Hannah ([hannahlja@gmail.com](mailto:hannahlja@gmail.com)) if you would like to offer feedback or suggestions. You can always view the most up-to-date version of this document online at [tinyurl.com/WP4BLglossary](http://tinyurl.com/WP4BLglossary).

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**Able-Bodied:** This term refers to people without disabilities.

**Ableism:** The systemic oppression of a group of people because of what they can or cannot do with their bodies or minds. Discrimination against people with disabilities, including the expression of hate for people with disabilities, denial of accessibility, rejection of disabled applicants for housing and jobs, institutionalized discrimination in the form of benefits systems designed to keep people with disabilities in poverty.

**Abolition:** (From Critical Resistance) Abolition is a political vision that seeks to eliminate the need for prisons, policing, and surveillance by creating sustainable alternatives. Abolition isn't simply about getting rid of buildings full of cages (prisons and jails), but about undoing the society we live in because the system we are working to end both feeds on and perpetuates structural oppression and inequalities through punishment, violence, and the control of literally millions of people. Because the prison industrial complex is not an isolated system, abolition is a broad strategy. An abolitionist vision means that we must build models today that can represent how we want to live in the future. It means developing practical strategies for taking small steps that move us toward making our dreams real and that lead the average person to believe that things really could be different. It means living this vision in our daily lives. Abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long term goal.

**Accessibility:** The "ability to access" and benefit from some system or entity. The concept focuses on enabling access for people with disabilities, however, accessibility benefits to everyone. Another dimension of accessibility is the ability to access information, spaces and opportunities by minimizing the barriers.

**Ageism:** The stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people on the basis of their age.

**Antisemitism:** Discrimination against, violence towards, or stereotypes of Jews for being Jewish.

**Bias:** A personal outlook that may lead to judgment based not on facts or experience but on irrational and often illogical belief—otherwise known as prejudice. Bias is learned, which means it can be unlearned, through personal efforts and education.

**BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

**Capacity:** The ability to do a particular thing.

**Christian Hegemony/Supremacy:** Christian Hegemony is the everyday, pervasive, and systematic set of Christian values and beliefs, individuals and institutions that dominate all aspects of our society through the social, political, economic, and cultural power they wield. Christian Supremacy is the connective tissue among different systems of violence and domination that use the language, capital, and power of Christianity to seek their ends.

**Cis(gender):** A gender identity that society deems to match the person's assigned sex at birth. The prefix cis- means "on this side of" or "not across." A term used to call attention to the privilege of people who are not transgender.

**Cisheteropatriarchy:** A system of power based on the dominance and assumed supremacy of cisgender heterosexual men through the exploitation and oppression of women and the LGBTQ+ community. Also referred to as sexism. This includes oppressive constructs such as homophobia and transphobia.

**Classism:** Classism is differential treatment based on social class or perceived social class. Classism is the systematic oppression of subordinated class groups to advantage and strengthen the dominant class groups. It's the systematic assignment of characteristics of worth and ability based on social class.

**Collective Liberation:** Recognizing that all of our struggles are intimately connected, and that we must work together to create the kind of world we know is possible. Believing every person is worthy of dignity and respect, and that within systems of oppression everyone suffers.

**Colonialism:** Colonization can be defined as some form of invasion, dispossession and subjugation of a people. The invasion need not be military; it can begin—or continue—as geographical intrusion in the form of agricultural, urban or industrial encroachments. The result of such invasion is the theft of vast amounts of lands from the original inhabitants. This is often legalized after the fact. The long-term result of such massive dispossession is institutionalized inequality. The colonizer/colonized relationship is by nature an unequal one that benefits the colonizer at the expense of the colonized.

**Cultural Appropriation:** Theft of cultural elements for one's own use, commodification, or profit — including symbols, art, language, customs, etc. — often without understanding, acknowledgement, or respect for its value in the original culture. Results from the assumption of a dominant (i.e. white) culture's right to take other cultural elements.

**Cultural Racism:** Cultural racism is how the dominant culture is founded upon and then shapes the society's norms, values, beliefs and standards to validate and advantage white people while oppressing People of Color. Cultural racism is how the dominant culture defines

reality to validate and advantage white people while oppressing People of Color. Cultural racism uses cultural differences to overtly and covertly assign value and normality to white people and whiteness in order to rationalize the unequal status and degrading treatment of People and Communities of Color.

**Disability:** Americans with Disabilities Act definition of “person with a disability”: A person who: (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; (2) has a record of such an impairment; or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment. On the other hand, the social model of disability (which came out of Disability Rights activism) says that disability is not an attribute of an individual, but rather a complex collection of conditions, many of which are created by the social environment. Hence, the management of the problem requires social action and is the collective responsibility of society at large to make the environmental modifications necessary for the full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of social life.

**Disability Justice:** Disability justice is a movement not simply for the rights of people with disabilities as a whole, but for many forms of liberation and empowerment, as well as mutual support and sustainable systems of care for us all. The Disability Justice framework understands that all bodies are unique and essential, that all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met.

**Disposability Culture:** A culture of “throwing away” people with whom we are in conflict, who have created harm, and/or who don’t fit our model of a “good person.” Denouncing each other and burning bridges because we don’t know how to reconcile our social ideals with the fact that our community members don’t always live up to them, in part so that we can focus on the failings of others and avoid examining the complicity with oppression, the capacity to harm, that exists within us all. Also, in part because sometimes it’s impossible to imagine any other way. We live in a disposability culture – a society based on consumption, fear, and destruction – where we’re taught that the only way to respond when people hurt us is to hurt them back or get rid of them. The opposite of disposability culture is indispensability culture.

**Dominant Culture:** The dominant culture in a society refers to the established language, religion, behavior, values, rituals, and social customs. These traits are often the norm for the society as a whole. The dominant culture is usually (but not always) in the majority, and achieves its dominance by controlling social institutions such as communication, educational institutions, artistic expression, law, political process, and business.

**Dominant White Culture:** In the United States, the dominant culture, established through law and economics and continually promoted through media, education, and religious institutions is white or white Anglo-Saxon protestant culture. As white people, we are socialized, beginning at an early age and most often indirectly or subconsciously, to take on certain attitudes and worldviews and act out particular behaviors and habits based on our privileged racial status.

**Ethnicity:** Belonging to a large group of people who share common and distinctive national or geographic origin, culture, religion, language, or the like.

**Folx:** A variation on the word *folks*, *folx* is meant to be a gender-neutral way to indicate inclusion of other marginalized groups including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) and queer and trans people.

**Gender:** A social construct used to classify a person as a woman, man, or some other identity. Fundamentally different from the sex one is assigned at birth.

**Gender Binary System:** A system of exploitation, which dictates that there are two acceptable genders (woman/man) and regulates what it means to be a woman or man (feminine/masculine). A gender regime informs our understandings of our bodies, our assigned and acceptable “roles,” and the punishments that come with challenging those role. A gender regime is policed and upheld by cisheteropatriarchy and closely linked to white supremacy and capitalism.

**Gendered:** Having a denotative or connotative association with being either (traditionally) masculine or feminine.

**Gender Non-conforming:** A person who does not subscribe to gender expressions or roles expected of them by society.

**Genderqueer:** A person whose gender identity and/or gender expression falls outside of the dominant societal norm for their assigned sex, is beyond genders, or is some combination of them.

**Heteronormativity:** A set of lifestyle norms, practices, and institutions that promote binary alignment of biological sex, gender identity, and gender roles; assume heterosexuality as a fundamental and natural norm; and privilege monogamous, committed relationships and reproductive sex above all other sexual practices.

**Heterosexism:** An ideological and social system of compulsory and assumed heterosexuality, based on binary gender, which denies and persecutes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community, and privileges straight people/people who present gender in a normative way. Patriarchy relies on heterosexism to enforce strict gender roles and definitions. Heterosexism upholds “nuclear” families and punishes other family structures and reproductive choices.

**Homophobia:** The fear or hatred of homosexuality (and other non-heterosexual identities), and persons perceived to be gay or lesbian

**Implicit Bias:** Also known as unconscious or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness. Many studies have indicated that implicit biases affect individuals’ attitudes and actions, thus creating real-world implications, even though individuals may not even be aware that those biases exist within themselves. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to trump individuals’ stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is often used to measure implicit biases with regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other topics.

**Indigenous:** Indigenous populations are composed of the existing descendants of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them, by conquest, settlement or other means and reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic and cultural customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form part, under a state structure which incorporates mainly national, social and cultural characteristics of other segments of the population which are predominant. (Example: Maori in territory now defined as New Zealand; Mexicans in territory now defined as Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, and Oklahoma; Native American tribes in territory now defined as the United States).

**Indispensability Culture:** A culture of being in community that recognizes we need one another as human beings, that a movement to dismantle White Supremacy needs as many people as we can get, and that nobody is disposable. Indispensability culture requires us to find restorative ways of moving through conflict and harm, as an alternative to throwing people away. Indispensability culture is the opposite of disposability culture.

**Institutional Racism:** Institutional racism refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.

**Intersectionality:** A theory that recognizes the complexity of identity and experience as constructed by multiple, interlocking systems of power (such as racism, classism, sexism...) for the purpose of understanding and shifting those systems of power. Intersectionality argues that classifications such as gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they interact and intersect in individuals' lives and in society. (Term originally coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw).

**Islamophobia:** The fear, hatred of, prejudice against or discrimination against, the Islamic religion, Muslims generally, or those perceived to be Muslim. Racism and xenophobia toward people from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia who are Muslim or who have a "Muslim-like" appearance

**-Ism:** A social phenomenon and psychological state where prejudice is accompanied by the power to systemically enact it.

**LGBTQ+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and others. You might also see it written as LGBTQIA, with the 'I' signifying intersex (i.e. a person born with anatomical characteristics (like sex chromosomes and genitalia) that don't fit the standard definitions of male or female) and the 'A' signifying either ally (i.e. supportive) or asexual (i.e. someone who generally does not feel sexual attraction).

**Marginalized:** Excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community.

**Microaggression:** The everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

**Model Minority:** Refers to a minority ethnic, racial, or religious group whose members achieve a higher degree of success than the population average. This success is typically measured in income, education, and related factors such as low crime rate and high family stability.

**Multiethnic:** An individual that comes from more than one ethnicity. An individual whose parents are born from more than one ethnicity.

**Multiracial:** An individual that comes from more than one race. An individual whose parents are born from more than one race.

**Neocolonialism / Neoimperialism:** The economic and political policies by which a great power indirectly maintains or extends its dominance over other areas or people. The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside. The methods and form of this direction can take various shapes. For example, in an extreme case the troops of the imperial power may garrison the territory of the neo-colonial State and control the government of it. More often, however, neo-colonialist control is exercised through economic or monetary means. The neo-colonial State may be obliged to take the manufactured goods of the imperialist power to the exclusion of competing products from elsewhere. Control over government policy in the neo-colonial State may be secured by payments towards the cost of running the State, by the provision of civil servants in positions where they can dictate policy, and by monetary control over foreign exchange through the imposition of a banking system controlled by the imperial power.

**Neoliberalism:** The current phase of capitalism we are in, which began in the early 1970s. Neoliberal policies were crafted to decrease the power, organization, and wealth of people of color and the working class, and to increase the power, organization, and wealth of the ruling class on a global level. Neoliberalism is characterized by: 1) eliminating regulations of private industry, including regulations that protect workers and the environment. 2) cutting of public services like healthcare, welfare, education, unemployment benefits and job training and investment in public works such as transportation. 3) privatization of public services such as healthcare, water, education, snow clearing, transportation, libraries etc.; public space, such as parks; and shrinking or eliminating the parts of the government that used to coordinate these services. 4) shrinking the amount of taxes that rich people and corporations pay 5) an increase in policing, imprisonment, and the military. 6) a set of ideas that is extremely individualist, and that believes that the free market will solve all of our problems

**Neurodivergent:** Having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal." Neurodivergent is quite a broad term. Neurodivergence (the state of being neurodivergent) can be largely or entirely genetic and innate, or it can be largely or entirely produced by brain-altering experience, or some combination of the two (autism and dyslexia are examples of innate forms of neurodivergence, while alterations in brain functioning caused by such things as trauma, long-term meditation

practice, or heavy usage of psychedelic drugs are examples of forms of neurodivergence produced through experience).

**Neurotypical:** Having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards of “normal.” Neurotypical can be used as either an adjective (“He’s neurotypical”) or a noun (“He’s a neurotypical”). Neurotypical is the opposite of neurodivergent. Neurotypicality is the condition from which neurodivergent people diverge. Neurotypical bears the same sort of relationship to neurodivergent that straight bears to Queer.

**Oppression:** Systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; when some people are denied something of value, while others have ready access. Results from the use of institutional power and privilege where one person or group benefits at the expense of another. Oppression is the use of power and the effects of domination.

**Othering:** Treating people from another group as essentially different from and generally inferior to the group you belong to

**Patriarchy:** a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property.

**People of Color:** A collective term for men and women of Asian, African, Latin and Native American backgrounds; as opposed to the collective "White" for those of European ancestry.

**Personal Gender Pronouns (PGPs):** A gender pronoun is the pronoun that a person uses for themselves. (e.g. they/theirs, she/her, he/him)

**PGPs:** Personal Gender Pronouns

**POC:** People of Color

**Privilege:** Unearned social power accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to ALL members of a dominant group (e.g. white privilege, male privilege, etc.). Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we’re taught not to see it, but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage over those who do not have it.

**PWD:** Person With Disability

**Queer:** An umbrella term that can refer to anyone who doesn’t fit into society's view of “normal or traditional” gender or sexuality. The vagueness of the word Queer, its elasticity, is one of its defining characteristics: "A zone of possibilities."

**Race:** A made up social construct, not an actual biological fact, that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance, ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given time.

**Racial Justice:** The struggle for policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all. A wide range of ways in which groups and individuals struggle to change laws, policies, practices, and ideas that reinforce and perpetuate racial disparities.

**Racism:** Intrapersonal (internalized), interpersonal, cultural, and institutional ways that create different outcomes for different racial groups; advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as People of Color. Prejudice plus power. The primary tool of white supremacy culture.

**Reparations:** (Reparations for Slavery) Compensation provided to the descendants of enslaved people in the United States, in consideration of the forced and uncompensated labor their ancestors performed over centuries. This compensation has been proposed in a variety of forms, from individual monetary payments to land-based compensation related to independence.

**Sex:** biological classification of male or female (based on genetic or physiological features); as opposed to gender.

**Sexism:** Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on difference in sex/gender; usually by men against women.

**Sexual Orientation:** one's natural preference in sexual partners

**Social Construct:** A social construct is something that exists not in objective reality, but as a result of human interaction; an idea that has been created and accepted by the people in a society.

**Social Justice:** A socially just world meets everyone's basic needs (food, housing, health care, education, job, social security) in a dignified way; treats people from every background with dignity and respect; supports the development of all people to their full potential; guarantees equitable distribution of resources; makes sure all people are physically and psychologically safe and secure; and ensures everyone has a voice in the decisions that affect them.

**Solidarity:** Showing up alongside people struggling for their liberation, because we can see how our struggle and our liberation is connected.

**Structural Racism:** See "Institutional Racism"

**Systemic Racism:** See "Institutional Racism"

**System of Oppression:** Cultural and institutional values and habits which support the oppression of some persons and groups of people by other persons and groups. These systems take on many forms but they all have essentially the same structure. Systems of oppression are built around the ideology of superiority of some groups and inferiority of others, and seeks to keep and consolidate power.



**Trans/Transgender:** Adjective used most often as an umbrella term, and frequently abbreviated to “trans.” This adjective describes a wide range of identities and experiences of people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from conventional expectations based on their assigned sex at birth. Not all trans people undergo medical transition (surgery or hormones). Some commonly held definitions: (1) Someone whose determination of their sex and/or gender is not validated by dominant societal expectations; someone whose behavior or expression does not “match” their assigned sex according to society. (2) A gender outside of the man/woman binary. (3) Having no gender or multiple genders.

**Transphobia:** Transphobia is a strong dislike, hatred, sense of disgust, or fear related to trans\* people. It is observed in both conservative anti-LGBTQ+ circles and in some self-identified progressive communities, such as the trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERF) movement. Transphobic beliefs and practices are a source of anxiety, violence, and systematic discrimination against transgender people. Transphobia intersects significantly with other forms of hatred and discrimination, including homophobia and misogyny, and may take the form of transmisogyny.

**Triggering:** An emotional response such as fear, sadness, panic, flashbacks, and pain, as well as any physical symptoms associated with these emotions (shaking, loss of appetite, fainting, fatigue, and so on) often as a result of a traumatic event. Triggering can vary in severity, and is often most harmful when the trigger has been encountered without any prior warning.

**White Privilege:** The societal privilege that benefits white people, beyond what is commonly experienced by non-white people under the same social, political, or economic circumstances. In a popular article, Peggy McIntosh describes white privilege as an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. White privilege doesn't mean that some white people's lives haven't been hard; it means the color of their skin isn't one of the things making it harder.

**White Supremacy:** A historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.

**White Supremacy Culture:** White supremacy culture is the idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. White supremacy culture is reproduced by all the institutions of our society. In particular the media, the education system, western science (which played a major role in reinforcing the idea of race as a biological truth with the white race as the "ideal" top of the hierarchy), and the Christian church have played central roles in reproducing the idea of white supremacy (i.e. that white is "normal," "better," "smarter," "holy" in contrast to Black and other People and Communities of Color). White supremacy culture is an artificial, historically constructed culture which expresses, justifies and binds together the United States white supremacy system. It is the glue that binds together white-controlled institutions into systems and white-controlled systems into the global white supremacy system.

**Xenophobia:** The fear and distrust of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange. Xenophobia can manifest itself in suspicion of the activities of others, and a desire to eliminate

their presence to secure a presumed purity and may relate to a fear of losing national, ethnic or racial identity.