Basic Vocabulary for Racial Justice
By Soul Fire Farm

**Spiritual Activist:** The spiritual activist recognizes that we are each responsible for healing injustice in the world, through working at the intersection of what is most needed and what our passion fuels us to offer. We operate from a place of love and compassion for ourselves, other humans, and the earth. We do not separate the work of the head and the heart, rather infusing connection, ritual, and prayer into our rigorous strategic action for a more just and sustainable world. ~Leah Penniman

**White Supremacy:** An 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 establishing, maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege. It encompasses the entire system of White domination, diffused and infused in all aspects of society including its history, culture, politics, economics and entire social fabric, producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. ~Ellen Tuzzolo

**Institutionalized Racism:** The erroneous concept that one group is better than another and has the right to control the other gets embedded in the institutions of the society, the laws, the legal system and police practice, the education system, hiring practices, public policy, housing development, media images, political power, etc. When 1 out of 4 African American men are in jail or on probation, it is institutionalized racism. Consider that dominant culture also controls the language itself used to describe all groups in society and can make things visible or invisible when necessary. Other examples/things to consider are the “War on Drugs” instead of “War on Poverty”, as well as an expanded definition of violence and how violence towards targeted groups happens at a systemic level. ~John Bell

**Internalized Racism:** The personal conscious or subconscious acceptance of the dominant society’s racist views, stereotypes and biases of one’s ethnic group. It gives rise to patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that result in discriminating, minimizing, criticizing, finding fault, invalidating, and hating oneself while simultaneously valuing the dominant culture. ~Suzanne Lipsky

**White Privilege:** Whites in Western societies enjoy advantages that non-whites do not experience, as "an invisible package of unearned assets". It denotes both obvious and less obvious passive advantages that white people may not recognize they have, which distinguishes it from overt bias or prejudice. These include cultural affirmations of one’s own worth; presumed greater social status; and freedom to move, freedom to move, buy, work, play, and speak freely. The effects can be seen in professional, educational, and personal contexts. The concept also implies the right to assume the universality of one’s own experiences, marking others as different or exceptional while perceiving oneself as normal. ~Peggy McIntosh

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**Frontier Mentality:** The erroneous idea that the way to solve existing problems is to create a new initiative or organization, rather than support existing projects led by frontlines communities. This myth is rooted in the frontier mindset of European colonizers who romanticized the “Wild West” as an “unsettled” area with unlimited free land and opportunity. This myth drove the brutal exploitation of First Nations people, Mexican-Americans and Blacks and the exploitation of natural resources. ~Leah Penniman

**Cultural Appropriation:** Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission. This can include unauthorized use of another culture's dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc. It's most likely to be harmful when the source community is a minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive, e.g. sacred objects. ~Susan Scafidi

**Post-Racial or “Colorblind:”** By claiming that they do not see race, they also can avert their eyes from the ways in which well-meaning people engage in practices that reproduce neighborhood and school segregation, rely on “soft skills” in ways that disadvantage racial minorities in the job market, and hoard opportunities in ways that reserve access to better jobs for white peers. They argue that as the mechanisms that reproduce racial inequality have become more covert and obscure than they were during the era of open, legal segregation, the language of explicit racism has given way to a discourse of colorblindness. But they fear that the refusal to take public note of race actually allows people to ignore manifestations of persistent discrimination. ~Adia Harvey Wingfield

**Self-Appointed White Ally:** Live tweeting Ferguson and hashtagging victims of police brutality’s names is modish but lackadaisical. Putting “ally” in your twitter bio does not qualify you to check off your daily “good ally to people of color deed.” No one can give themselves the “ally” label - it's earned, ongoing, and a VERB. Acting as an ally involves backing up the accounts of people of color regarding racist structures and acts. It also means using white privilege to confront racial injustice. ~Sarah Sahim

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**My Reflections and Questions**

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