

E.D.I. – J.E.D.I. An alphabet soup or a culture shift?

Within recent years, offices of “Equity and Inclusion” have popped up in the corporate, government and small business realms, and with them the acronyms: “JEDI” and “EDI”. Not too long ago most associated Jedi with Star Wars, these days JEDI could refer to “Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion”.

Some entities establish offices of Equity and Inclusion at the advice of their legal departments or in an effort to have the entity appear anti-racist”, without actually using the more forthright yet controversial term “racism.” Some well-intentioned managers hope these efforts will result in a just, equitable, diverse, inclusive society.

But what exactly does Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion mean? Is there an understanding of why intentional work towards justice, equity, diversity and inclusion needs to take place? Is there a driving force working across sectors and in unison toward undoing racism and a Just, Equitable, Diverse, Inclusive society?

Let’s begin at a critical point... How did all of this start?

Achieving justice, equity, diversity and inclusion was an anti-racism strategy embraced by the 1960’s Civil Rights Movement. During this early phase the focus was on racial integration of workplaces, schools, and communities.

Civil rights advocates soon realized that simply boosting the numbers of under-represented people in systems designed to maintain white male privilege did little to eradicate racism.

Fast-forward to current times. Through the work of many civil rights activists, institutionalized, systemic barriers have been and continue to be exposed. And in various places and spaces, work is taking place to bring to light and dismantle these barriers, such as racial redlining, racial law enforcement profiling, predatory lending that targets people of color; and educational, judicial, and financial practices that maintain racial segregation and oppression without the explicit apartheid of Jim Crow.

At the core of this effort is work to understand what racism is, how it has been created and maintained in the U.S., and how it can be undone.

“Racism is very real, but racial classifications are something people created, in order to maintain the power and privilege of white Europeans,” says Diana Dorn-Jones, Executive Director of USBC and co-founder of the Anti-Racism Training Institute of the Southwest, a project of USBC. “Human classification by race has no basis in biology. We know that since it was people who made up the specious concept of separate races, the resulting racism can be ‘undone’ by people, as well.”

For over 30 years ARTI has partnered closely with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB). Founded by two young black community organizers who met through the United Methodist Church Voluntary Services Program (<https://pisab.org/our-history/>), PISAB continues to lead the way in undoing racism.

ARTI and PISAB work together to prepare participants to organize and build “nets that work” to undo racism in New Mexico. We do this by conducting workshops facilitated by community-based activists schooled in the principles and organizing methods practiced for decades by the People's Institute. The result is a paradigm shift in thinking and action that comes about by viewing systems through the lens of race.

ARTI shares the following foundational premises put forth by the People's Institute:

- Racism is inextricably woven into the founding principles of the United States
- Racism is not natural: it was done by people and it can be undone by people
- Racism can be undone through effective anti-racist organizing with, and in accountable relationship to the communities most impacted by racism
- Effective community, systems and institutional change happen when those who serve as agents of transformation understand the foundations of race and racism and how those systems continually function as a barrier to community self-determination, self-sufficiency, and interdependency

Over a series of postings, we will take a closer look at justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. We invite you to share your thoughts and suggestions of anti-racist practices you or your organization have implemented with the goal of creating a more just, equitable, diverse, inclusive environment.

If you are interested in beginning your journey to undoing racism, we invite you to inquire about future ARTI workshops. For additional information, reach out Mikki at: artisw.info@gmail.com. We assure you that the experience you'll have during the workshop will be transformational.

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