


Racial and Ethnic Terms Glossary

Learning language and terminology is hard! Words have meaning and are connected to more significant social, cultural, and political histories. We often find ourselves in many conversations where people are at different stages of understanding the social systems and power structures around us. In these conversations, a fear emerges within many of us: Am I saying the “wrong” thing? What does this term mean? Is this term being misinterpreted in this context? These questions and fears get in the way of deep and engaging conversations about identity, equity, and inclusion.



It’s important to remember that language is constantly evolving, often developing new political significance and gaining different meanings and interpretations depending on the identities, lived experiences, and social contexts. It is often challenging to have robust and meaningful conversations about complex topics like race, ethnicity, nationality, and white supremacy without a shared understanding of common terms. Remember that if you don’t know the term a person uses to self-identify, and it’s an appropriate/relevant circumstance, ask them, don’t assume.

To help you develop a shared understanding of frequently used terms about race and ethnicity, we have put together a glossary!

POC: This term stands for People of Color. This term became more frequently used in the late 1970s as a unifying and more inclusive framework to refer to all racial groups that are not White and to address the racial inequities they experienced. While [POC](#) can be a useful term, it often conflates and equates the experiences of many different racial and ethnic groups, each of which has distinct and specific experiences with race.


BIPOC: This term stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. [BIPOC](#) centers and leads with Black and Indigenous identities to address anti-Black racism and the erasure of Indigenous communities. This term uplifts the collective power of all people of color, especially Black and Indigenous people, and is also committed to advancing racial justice and dismantling White supremacy.

White supremacy culture: “White supremacy culture is the widespread ideology baked into the beliefs, values, norms, and standards of our groups (many if not most of them), our communities, our towns, our states, our nation, teaching us both overtly and covertly that whiteness holds value, whiteness is value. It teaches us that Blackness is not only valueless but also dangerous and threatening.” (from Tema Okun, [White supremacy culture](#))



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African American: This refers to people in the United States whose lineage can be traced to Africa. Not [all](#) Black people identify with the term African American. While the US census groups Black or African American as one category, there is a clear distinction between the two.




American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS): This [term](#) refers to all Black Americans who are descendants of formerly enslaved people and are committed to seeking reparations for chattel slavery and its ongoing consequences, including the racial wealth gap, incarceration, systemic inequities in education and healthcare, redlining, and gentrification all of which disproportionately affect Black people in the United States. ADOS are also committed to advocating for policies that eliminate the discrimination experienced by Black people of all backgrounds in the US.

Black: This term refers to people of African descent worldwide, including African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, Afro-Latino, and African immigrants living in the United States. The term Black has a specific political significance in the race discourse in the United States. While it covers a broader range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, it also overlooks the differences within African populations.

Native American: This [term](#) came into use in the 1960s, referring to the over 2,000 tribal groups and their descendants native to the land of what became the United States and its territories through European colonization. Native American is not a monolithic term; there are numerous languages, cultures, and tribal membership systems within Native American communities.

Indigenous: “Indigenous people 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, and, by conquest, settlement, or other means, 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.” (From [Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#), United Nations)




For example, Maori people are the Indigenous people of New Zealand, and Mexicans are the Indigenous people of what is now considered Texas, California, New Mexico, etc.

First Nations: This term came into usage in the 1970s, replacing the use of Indian or Native. First Nations refers to the groups of people officially recognized as Indians under the Indian Act of

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Canada. First Nations also refers to the separate nations that occupied the unceded territory before European colonization. There are over 630 First Nations in Canada. For instance, the [Okanagan Nation](#) comprises seven member communities, including the Penticton Indian Band, Okanagan Indian Band, Westbank First Nation, and Upper and Lower Similkameen Indian Bands.

Chicano/a/X: This identifier is for people of Mexican descent born in the United States. The term became popularized by Mexican Americans during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s. Some Central Americans also identify with Chicano.



Latino/Latina/LatinX/Latine: LatinX is a pan-ethnic, gender-neutral term that is often used to describe people and culture of Latin American descent, including people from countries like Brazil, Martinique, Haiti, Saint Martin, Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, Chile, and French Guiana (among others). LatinX is not common practice, and it is widely debated about its appropriateness in a gendered language like Spanish. This led to the development of the term [Latine](#), which provides a gender-neutral ending in Spanish.


Hispanic: The term Hispanic is used to describe people and their descendants from Spanish-speaking countries, including many Latin American countries *and* Spain. However, this term excludes people and descendants from Latin American countries that do not speak Spanish, such as Haiti and Brazil. The term Hispanic is widely critiqued for centering on Spain as the origin without fully recognizing the cultural, linguistic, and social differences between Latin America and Spain.

AAPI: This [term](#) stands for Asian American Pacific Islanders, which consists of over 50 ethnic groups that speak over 100 distinct languages, with ancestries connected to Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, India, Sri Lanka, and Hawaii, among others. According to the 2020 census, 24 million people identified as Asian, and nearly 1.6 million individuals identified as Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander.

Asian: This term refers to individuals from all parts of Asia, including Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Southwest Asia. However, each piece of Asia comprises distinct nations with different cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and racial groups. The term Asian often overlooks and conflates the myriad racial and ethnic identities. For instance, many people who identify as Arabs or Arab Americans are from nations in Southwest Asia, such as Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, etc., and their cultural, linguistic, and ethnic groups are drastically different from Southeast Asia or South Asia.

Asian Americans: This term was first coined in the 1960s with the intention of channeling the power of individuals of Asian origin. There are over 20 million Asian Americans in the United

States, and almost all trace their roots to 19 origin groups from East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. The six [most represented](#) ethnic groups among Asian Americans in the United States include Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese. A smaller segment of Asian Americans traces their roots to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Bhutan, Mongolia, and Thailand.




South Asians: [These](#) individuals trace their roots to 8 nations—Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. South Asian communities are far from homogenous, with their people speaking over 650 distinct languages, practicing several religions, and possessing different immigration histories. Approximately 5.4 million South Asians live in the United States.

Southeast Asians: [Southeast Asians](#) are people who trace their roots to nations that are south of China and East of India. This includes Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Laos, Indonesia, Burma, Cambodia, and Timor-Leste. Southeast Asians make up the largest share of the total Asian immigrant population in the US.

East Asians: East Asians trace their roots to China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Mongolia. Chinese Americans account for [24% of the Asian population](#) in the US, making them the most prominent Asian origin group.

Arab Americans: [Arab Americans](#) are immigrants or descendants of immigrants from Arabic-speaking nations in North Africa and Southwest Asia who also identify as American. This includes individuals from 22 modern-day countries such as Egypt, Palestine, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Somalia, Djibouti, etc. There are nearly 3.7 million Arab Americans in the US today.

MENA: This term refers to the geographical region of the Middle East and North Africa, which is composed of 22 nations—Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Mauritania, and the Comoros Islands.





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This list of terms is ever-evolving and non-exhaustive. If there are terms you would like to see included, send us an email at info@adawaygroup.com.

Here are a few additional resources that you can refer to:

- [Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#)
- [The Diversity Style Guide](#)
- [Diversity and Inclusion Glossary](#)