

# Past, Present, & Future of Disability Justice

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[Glossary can be found here](#)

## Common misconceptions from appropriation of Disability Justice

Because of the misappropriation of it by White, Cis, Straight Disabled people, when people hear the words “Disability Justice” some assume I mean justice for only disabled people or Disabled-identifying people, who are mostly white or privileged in other ways. Physical access only, disability access only. Formal systems and service processes treat disability in a way that is informed by white supremacy and colonization. Some could be disabled and not know it for many reasons.

However, when people actually learn about what Disability Justice is, they should also think of White supremacy, ableism, all inaccessibility, racism, homophobia, transphobia, colonialism, intersecting oppressions; all of which are connected and rely on each other to continue. They should think of a commitment to land back, climate justice, reproductive justice, environmental justice, healing justice, racial justice, animal liberation, abolition, gender/queer justice, and other avenues for dismantling systems of oppression and investing in our people.

## So, what is Disability Justice?

The disability justice movement-building framework is a critical response to “cliffhangers” of the disability rights movement; including (1) it has a single-issue identity of only focusing on disability in lieu of its intersections, (2) it lacks acknowledgement of white privilege that the most platformed and centered leaders hold whose experiences are most represented and considered, and finally, (3) it focused on mobility impairments and thus, issues relating exclusively to physical accessibility. The movement and framework of disability justice was

created by those most targeted by interlocking systems of oppression to respond to criticisms of the disability rights movement. “At its core, the disability rights framework centers people who can achieve status, power and access through a legal or rights-based framework, which we know is not possible for many disabled people, or appropriate for all situations (Sins Invalid 2020).” There is a single-issue and single-identity nature of the disability rights movement, meaning power and privilege is often uncontended for those most centered in and protected by disability advocacy.

“While a concrete and radical move forward toward justice for disabled people, the Disability Rights Movement simultaneously invisibilized the lives of disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, disabled people who practice marginalized religions (in particular those experiencing the violence of anti-Islamic beliefs and actions), queers with disabilities, trans and gender non-conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others (Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Our Movement is Our People, Sins Invalid 2019 p. 8-9 of plain text version).” Disability justice addresses inaccessibility and ableism in racial justice and other movements.

## So, what is ableism?

Talila Lewis, Dustin Gibson, and other Black and otherwise negatively racialized disabled community members annually update a working definition of ableism, which for 2022 is defined as: “A system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. This systemic oppression that leads to people and society determining people's value based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place, "health/wellness", and/or their ability to satisfactorily re/produce, "excel" and "behave." You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism (TL, Gibson, & community 2022).”

Disability Justice includes Racial Justice. Talila Lewis says, “The root of racism is ableism; and the root of ableism is anti-Blackness. Ableism & racism have always

been inextricably linked. Each of these oppressions informs the other and depends on the other to survive and thrive. Therefore, it is impossible to end racism without ending ableism, and impossible to end ableism without ending racism. Ableism is also at the root of every other oppression (TL, 2019).”

## Disability Justice has 10 principles

The 10 principles of disability justice, created by Sins Invalid, include intersectionality, leadership of those most impacted, anti-capitalism, cross-movement organizing, recognizing wholeness, sustainability, cross-disability solidarity, interdependence, collective access, & collective liberation (Sins Invalid 2015). In-depth explanations of these principles can be found at [TinyUrl.com/10DJPrinciples](https://TinyUrl.com/10DJPrinciples). In my work, I use the principles of Disability Justice to enhance my own quality of life, advance individual wellness for those I support, & strive towards social justice. These principles can be used to advance Racial Justice (Rebel Sidney Black 2022).

## The present of Disability Justice

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and Stacey Park Milbern dreamed of having a Disability Justice Audit for BIPOC-led organizations, which Leah made happen through the Northwest Health Foundation. In this audit, Leah lists the following issues as examples of the variety of what Disability Justice activists have organized around:

- “Police violence and murder of disabled and Deaf BIPOC, and prison justice for disabled and Deaf imprisoned BIPOC
- Medical abuse, denial of care and experimentation on disabled BIPOC communities, including fighting against “ICUgenics” and the denial of care and vaccines to disabled and chronically ill people during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Climate justice, surviving climate catastrophe and fighting for the rights of disabled, elder and medically vulnerable people to survive climate events, in and outside institutions
- Fighting immigrations laws like Trump’s public charge law that excludes

disabled people from being able to migrate

- Fighting voter suppression of disabled people, particularly BIPOC
- Equal access to education for BIPOC disabled youth and adults, ending the special-ed-to-prison pipeline
- We are also a movement full of cultural workers, community builders and educators, expressing ourselves through art, performance, zines, online communities, clothing, writing, music, hiphop and many forms of storytelling and creation. The community building, friendships and networks of collective care we create are as much a part of our work as big public campaigns (Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha 2022)."

## The past of Disability Justice

Sins Invalid has a [Disability Justice Timeline](#) that people can add submissions to. "Disability justice history does not start in the 1980s when disability studies entered the academy. Crips have been resisting for hundreds of years. It is important to us to create public knowledge of the history of resistance of disabled people of color and queer and trans disabled people. This is a pushback against our historic erasure due to intersecting systems of oppression. It is a strange experience to be the deciders of what is important enough to be documented in a timeline of resistance. This is something that, historically, disabled people of color and queer and trans disabled people have not had the opportunity to do. Gathering these histories has not been an easy task, especially because so many of our stories have been lost due to our erasure. We decided to ask our community for help. We asked 'what would you include in a timeline of disability justice?' (Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Our Movement is Our People, Sins Invalid 2019 p. 66 of plain text version)."

Indigenous. Mexican. Iranian. Child of immigrants. Disabled. Neurodivergent. Mentally ill. Mad. Psychiatric survivor. Brown. Fat. Gender non-binary. Queer. Assigned Female at birth. Previously houseless. These make up the labels, social identities, intersections, identifiers, personal info, and experiences that I hold; take pride in; face stigma for; am oppressed in relation to; am inspired by; draw creative wisdom, resilience, and perseverance from; and all inform my racial,

disability, and queer/gender justice; trauma-informed lens through which I work on macro-level issues towards equity, justice, & liberation.

People like me were historically killed; hidden by “ugly laws”; institutionalized; kept at home due to shame; and deemed unworthy of education, employment, health, independence, and a high quality of life. People like me are still more often killed, excluded, discriminated against, not chosen, deemed unworthy, deemed unintelligent, ostracized, gas-lit, abused, neglected, left, bullied, isolated, denied, rejected, and not taken seriously, believed, treated well, or represented. However, people like me are also resilient, wise, empathetic, diligent, passionate, and persevere. We know systems of oppression and its institutions best (i.e., institutionalization, incarceration, houselessness, foster care, poorness, violence, abuse, conservatorships, legally mandated care such as California’s new Care Court, discrimination in education and employment, and more).

## The future of Disability Justice

Not only are we all deserving of being able to survive and thrive, but we are also all entitled to self-determination, respect, equity, justice, development, growth, healing, inspiration, care, radical love, pleasure, health, meaningful connection, wellness, and much more. What if we centered the wisdoms of those most marginalized by society and globally to creatively trouble-shoot and problem solve in accordance with environmental and climate justice, disability justice, racial justice, gender and queer justice, abolition, transformative and restorative justice, language justice, animal justice, fat justice, health justice, and other forms of liberation? Why would we even want to go through inaccessible systems to access services when those very services don’t account for people like us, and don’t account for the medical racism and medical gaslighting we experience?

I also believe the following is needed for the future. The disability community can and should center, resource, support, and promote people and issues related to those most marginalized, impacted by, and thus familiar with systems of oppression. Just as we did for this summit.

We need disability justice consultation and education for businesses, organizations, educational institutions, government agencies, groups, families, communities, and individuals. We need to increase prioritization of disability

justice as a part of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion(+) initiatives.

Let's engage in cross-movement organizing to ensure collective liberation for all, including incarcerated bodyminds; undocumented immigrants; houseless neighbors; LGBTQ2SIA+ members; Black, Indigenous, and Multiracial People of Color; folks who undergo abortions; parents; students; older and younger individuals; animals; the environment; and more.

(Written by [Deanna Parvin Yadollahi](#), Racial & Disability Justice Product Copywriter & Facilitator with [the Keri Gray Consulting Group & National Alliance of Melanin Disabled Advocates](#), to be a resource and sneak peek for session 1 panel of the [NAMD Advocates Disabled BIPOC leadership summit](#), [originally published on NAMD Advocates' LinkedIn](#).)

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