



## SECULAR SYNAGOGUE ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT

### PREAMBLE

At Secular Synagogue, we believe the purpose of Judaism is two-directional goodness. That is, it enriches our lives and, in turn, makes us better agents of justice in the world.

Since our founding in 2018, we have been engaging in the work of building an anti-racist Jewish community. Anti-racism is a fundamental part of our spiritual Jewish identity and practice, for we know there is no meaningful Judaism without justice. Furthermore, there can be no justice without reconciling the racism within ourselves, our Jewish communities, and our world.

We believe that we can do and be more. We believe that Black Lives Matter. We believe that it is a Jewish responsibility to fight for justice all people who have experienced systematic and systemic oppression. We take seriously the idea that we are “not free to desist” from the work.

To demonstrate our collective commitment, Rabbi Denise Handlarski, on behalf of Secular Synagogue, has signed several open letters to the following organizations:

- [No Silence on Race](#) (Canada)
- [Not Free to Desist](#) (US)
- [Anti-Racism Small Business Pledge](#)

Rabbi Handlarski further commits to drawing on their respective pillars of social responsibility and calls to action, and commits to the following actions:

### ACTIVITIES AND ACTION

Including anti-racism as a cornerstone in our education, programming, and partnerships:

- Once per year as leader, I will encourage members of Secular Synagogue to join me in an [anti-racism course or program](#), and I will provide structures in the group for open, difficult, and meaningful conversation, as well as personal accountability.



- This work, which began with Layla F. Saad’s “Me and White Supremacy”, results in enriching and compelling conversations, which I will feature in our group social media platform and web members-area.
- We commit to forging meaningful partnerships with leaders and groups doing anti-racism work on the ground in Canada, the United States of America, and internationally. We have members from many countries, and we recognize that discussions of race must extend beyond the comfort of our doorsteps.
- We commit to continuing to hire and compensating cultural leaders, speakers, and educators for programs related to Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Colo(u)r (BIPOC). Examples include invite Indigenous leaders/educators for a Tu B’shvat (New Year of Trees) program, as well as contracting with an organizational consultant/educator on anti-Black racism initiatives. It is also a priority to pay Jews of Colo(u)r when outsourcing work (for example, technical/website work).
- We commit to decentering Ashkenormativity in our resources and programs, and we seek input from all Jewish cultures both internal and external to our membership. We recognize that synagogue communities change and grow, and we commit to providing these perspective and broad cultural experiences regardless of the current demographics of our organization. There are many cultures that contribute to what we call “cultural Judaism” and they will all be represented in our programming and materials.
- We commit to prioritizing Secular Synagogue’s tzedakah (justice) work to causes and/or organizations that
  - a) Positively impact BBIPOC communities through their focus on key issues,
  - b) Are led or otherwise partnered with BIPOC people to ensure integrity of mission. This includes our work both within and outside of Jewish community.
- We will offer educational working group opportunities to create partnerships fundraise for these tzedakah projects.
- Examples of some of our work to date include: Advocacy and fundraising for reproductive justice, with a focus on high maternal mortality rates for Black women; supporting Prisoner Rights Projects; educating and advocating for police defunding and other social justice programs designed to reduce police intervention and increase community agency; supporting Jewish advocacy efforts for better inclusion for Jews Colo(u)r in our community; and supporting the calls to action from Not Free to Desist and No Silence on Race (below).



- Action items are specifically linked to our mitzvah projects, which may occur sporadically but will increasingly be tied to certain holidays and cultural traditions, ensuring that we make inextricable the link between our Judaism and justice work we are compelled to pursue. For example, each Jewish month has a theme tied to a justice project; in the month of Tammuz, we focused on reproductive rights and its historical connection to Rosh Chodesh (the Jewish new moon/month).
- We will address incidents of racism that may occur in our group by lovingly calling in or offering correction to those members and leaders who make mistakes, display bias, or in any other way cause harm. We will not allow white silence or white fragility to get in the way of creating a loving and safe community for People of Colo(u)r. In leading with compassion, we hope to engender an environment that is empowering to both those harmed and those willing to grow and change for the better. As a function our membership, all of us commit to helping each other learn and grow in this way.

## ADVOCACY AND ALLYSHIP

We commit to making sure our group is meaningfully dedicated to the work of advocacy and purposeful, actionable, and genuine allyship:

- Beyond the above education, programming, and advocacy, as leader, Rabbi Handlarski will share will encourage the community at large to share, resources, articles, and calls to action written by Jews of Colo(u)r and other BIPOC thinkers and leaders. We want to amplify these voices as we educate ourselves and use our platform to educate others. A sense of awe and inspiration will underscore these efforts.
- We will join larger-scale political movements in the fight for racial justice, such as T’ruah: Rabbis for Human Rights, Bending the Arc, etc.
- We understand that “ally” is a verb and those of us with white privilege in the group commit to doing the work of unlearning and challenging our racism, as well as listening to the leadership of BIPOC/Jews of Colo(u)r in terms of how we can support them in their personal lives and in terms of our advocacy. We aim to be allies and accomplices in unravelling systems of white supremacy that some of us benefit from, even as we challenge them.



## ACCOUNTABILITY

We commit to staying and holding each other accountable:

- As the leader, I, Rabbi Handlarski, am asking and will continue to ask to be held to account. If I am corrected about a racist assumption, bias, mistake, or phrasing, I promise to be grateful for the correction, apologize genuinely and fully, and take meaningful steps to change or do better.
- I, Rabbi Handlarski, also promise to do the work of correcting racist assumptions, biases, mistakes, or phrasings for others in my community and beyond (including in my family, teaching, online forums, etc). I will do the work of allyship and have brave conversations, never letting racism slide.
- The whole Secular Synagogue community is committed to accountability on this issue in our group and in their own lives beyond the group.
- Once every three months the Secular Synagogue Advisory Council will meet to review this statement and its commitments, ensuring our efforts are sustained through diligent and careful consideration of our current and future mission and vision. We also agree that I will hold the Council accountable and vice versa to that aim.

## ACCESS

We commit to making our community accessible:

- Secular Synagogue is founded on the idea of low-cost and low-barrier Jewish community. In addition to our already accessible fees, we have a sponsorship program for free membership.
- Jews of Colo(u)r will have first priority in accessing this program and any future funds earmarked for accessibility.
- We commit to conducting marketing and outreach about our programming and options that is inclusive and accessible. We further commit to seeking consultation for how to best meet the needs and desire of BIPOC/Jews of Colo(u)r, both in actual programming and our outreach.



## ALWAYS

We commit to keep showing up to do this work:

- We are a diverse community within a diverse community. We know that racial justice is a Jewish value, and the highest expression of our Judaism is fighting for justice. We take the lessons we have learned from being targeted by antisemitism, and know that oppression, marginalization, discrimination is wrong. Our group will never be a place where Jews pit antisemitism against anti-racism.
- We recognize that Jewish ethnicity is complex, and we recognize that self-proclaimed white Jews, or Jews who may “white-pass”, have white privilege. We demand inclusive spaces for our BIPOC/Jews of Colo(u)r, where they can be heard and celebrated, and which they ultimately deserve as a basic human dignity and right. Racial justice is not a “project” of our community; it is central to how we understand ourselves and our Judaism. We work together to raise one another up, and we recognize the role that historical advantages conferred upon one group of Jews can be leveraged to benefit all Jews.
- We know this work is not easy nor quick. We promise to keep engaging, forging ahead, revising our commitments as we gain new understandings. As a community, Secular Synagogue will keep showing up to do this work.



## APPENDIX

The commitments in this statement are based on the calls to action from No Silence on Race and Not Free to Desist. These are their calls to action:

### **No Silence on Race - 9 pillars:**

- 1) Allyship: Creating anti-racist, inclusive and equitable Jewish spaces begins with each individual. We call on everyone within their organizations to make a personal pledge to the work of allyship and to devise a personal plan of 10-15 comprehensive ways they will work towards becoming strong allies and leaders in the creation of more inclusive and equitable Jewish spaces.
- 2) Education: Engage external facilitators for organization-wide anti-racism and anti-oppression education and training led by Black Jews, Jews of colour or people of colour consultants or consulting organizations.
- 3) Indigenous Education & Relationship Building: Engage in education about Indigenous peoples in Canada and cultural competency training. Build meaningful relationships with local Indigenous communities.
- 4) Equity Consultancy: Work with an equity consultant with a specialization in anti-racist work to formulate a multi-year strategic plan for your organization to create a roadmap towards inclusion, equity and anti-racist practices. This includes implementing non-discrimination policies, equitable hiring policies, anti-racist frameworks for organizational decision-making and a procedure to report and investigate any breaches of this policy.
- 5) Employment & Recruitment: Implement strategies to ensure equitable representation in your staffing as well as development and retention planning to ensure these practices are adequately conducted.
- 6) Equity, Inclusion, Anti-Racism Advisory: Accountability is essential. Create an advisory group to ensure that the E&I policy and strategies implemented are upheld at all levels of the organization. Create metrics to track ongoing anti-racism work.
- 7) Jews Of Colour Leadership Strategy: Invest in a leadership strategy to ensure that Jews of colour are poised to be adequately represented in leadership roles in the community. This can include mentorships, educational scholarships and project grants.
- 8) Programming/Events/Partnerships: Commit to more programming and partnerships with cultural institutions with the goal of engaging in and elevating a diverse range of Jewish diasporas and histories.
- 9) Amplify the Voices of Jews of Colour in Canada: Demonstrate explicit support for Jews of colour community groups and active initiatives. Engage in substantial outreach efforts.



## **Not Free to Desist - 7 calls to action:**

1) Explicit endorsement that Black Lives Matter. Recognizing that Black Lives Matter is a statement that is inherently true and should be accepted without caveat or qualification.

2) Establish racial justice and social equity as an explicit pillar of your organization. This should include but not be limited to: a) investment in education, spiritual nourishment, and community repair for the effects of racism within the Jewish community; b) investment in solidarity and support initiatives between JOC and non-Jewish POC communities; c) the creation of a fund to explicitly support anti-black racism initiatives and policy change in the communities you operate in; d) creation of an ongoing protocol for naming and addressing instances of racism when it happens and engaging in restorative justice.

3) Commit to explicit intersectional anti-racist and inclusive hiring and compensation practices. This should include but not be limited to: a) 20% of all Board Seats be occupied by people of color of which a significant portion should be JOC; b) 20% of all employees be people of color; c) 20% of all senior leadership be people of color of which a significant portion should include JOC; d) a dedicated fund to hire an external POC-led recruiting firm to source employees and board positions; e) internal support structure to ensure retention, training, and support explicitly for employees of color; f) mandated quarterly in-person and/or digital unconscious bias and anti-black racism training for all employees to be led by Black, JOC or POC consultants or consulting organizations; g) periodic review of compensation levels for all staff across various dimensions of diversity; h) 30% of compensation for senior leadership be contractually tied to the achievement of anti-racist hiring, staffing, and compensation goals; i) a mechanism to track these metrics and publicly post the results for community accountability.

4) Commit to anti-racist educational initiatives, curriculums, and frameworks. This should include but not be limited to: a) appreciation for the inherent multiracial identity of the Jewish community; b) inclusion of history of JOC communities around the world, and historical figures that identified as Black and Jewish; c) an anti-racist framework and lens for organizational decision making; d) public statement acknowledging the erasure of Jews of color and their traditions from textbooks, trainings, and Jewish education, and a commitment to actively and aggressively correct this erasure.

5) Invest in JOC and POC leadership development. This should include but not be limited to: a) a commitment for Jewish institutional funding to allocate 20% of all granted dollars to JOC and POC led organizations & initiatives; b) develop a strategic initiative within the Jewish Federated system with JOC leadership to fund JOC led organizations, initiatives, and individuals; c) JOC and POC involvement in the design,





implementation and review process of all initiatives that impact JOCs and POCs; d) JOC and POC involvement in all strategic decision making processes that impact the broader community; e) commitment to pay JOC and POC whenever they are asked for advice, consultation, or engagement with organizational initiatives; f) fully funded opportunities for JOC to engage with Jewish life at no cost, including Day School, Synagogue membership, fellowships, camps, conventions, and rabbinical schools.

6) Create a robust list of racial justice, equity, and inclusion requirements that all grantees receiving Jewish institutional funding must adhere to. This should include but not be limited to: a) a commitment to replacing contracts with police departments with alternative structures of community safety that prioritize inclusive anti-racist security practices; b) mandated quarterly in-person and/or digital unconscious bias and anti-black racism training for all employees to be led by Black, JOC or POC consultants or consulting organizations; c) anti-racist and inclusive hiring and compensation practices; d) public metrics to track ongoing anti-racism work.

7) Engage in the development of a fully funded initiative to assist in our communal accountability. This should include but not be limited to: a) at least a \$1.5M annual operating budget guaranteed for at least 5 years; b) a leadership team composed of majority Black Jews and JOCs; c) a focus and investment in coalition building among JOC led organizations and ventures; d) active support of this initiative to empower it to consult, support, and provide metrics for accountability to Jewish funders and organizations as they implement the above obligations; e) the creation of said organization should be advised by a JOC led and majority JOC task force.

