



2021 Racial Justice Award Honorees

The “Racial Justice Catalyst Award” award is given occasionally for outstanding achievements towards ending racial injustice. “Catalyst” awardees demonstrate leadership in inspiring others to end racial injustice and promoting social equity.



Cjala Surratt
Racial Justice Award:
Catalyst

Cjala Surratt tirelessly works to challenge “the norms” and policies within various organizations to shine a light on racial inequalities. Her impact is felt throughout the arts community and specifically at Syracuse University’s Lightworks, the Everson Museum, New York State Council on the Arts, CNY Arts, Inc., and other arts organizations and advocacy efforts across the state. She co-founded the Black Artist Collective, the Black Leadership Coalition, and Black Citizen’s Brigade Vintage Apparel. Ms. Surratt trains people in cultural sensitivity, and asks questions such as “Who is on the board? Who is in charge of activities? Who are the decision makers? Who runs development efforts? What are the patterns? How do we shape strategy to make processes more inclusive, accessible, impactful, and visible?” Ms. Surratt’s leadership and advocacy connects people and has served as a catalyst for the community in Syracuse, NY.

The “Racial Justice Award” is given annually to individuals whose efforts shall have produced change, or have contributed to make a change, towards ending racial injustice and promoting social equity.



Diana Perez
Racial Justice Award

Diana Perez, a Spanish teacher at the Institute of Technology in the Syracuse City School District, strives to educate students using a racial and social equity lens in her classroom and in her personal life. In her class she makes space for open dialogue about current events relating to race, and celebrates cultural differences through leading clubs, curriculum, and advocacy. She has developed and shared professional culturally responsive education strategies as a Professional Learning Community Leader and as a Demonstration Teacher within the district. Ms. Perez has been instrumental in advocating for and supporting ITC students to receive the New York State Seal of Biliteracy at their high school graduation. Ms. Perez continues to keep the topics of racism, social equity, and justice at the forefront of her educational and personal philosophies, and each student is affirmed and validated in her classroom.

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Nadia Thomas
Racial Justice Award:
Youth

Nadia Thomas, a senior at West Genesee High School, is being recognized for her leadership in student organizing and calling for change after student photos reenacting George Floyd’s murder surfaced. Through the last four years Nadia’s leadership development and advocacy experience includes volunteering at ACR Health annual fundraisers, attending women’s marches, and involvement with CuseYouth Black Lives Matter. As the reenactment photos surfaced her shock and anger manifested into action. Ms. Thomas and friends reached out to students and teachers, wrote speeches to share their experiences of racism, made signs, created a list of actionable items to present to the district, and led a student walk-out to bring attention to the issue of racism and the need for education. In Ms. Thomas’ words, “It was so important to me that we make a change before we graduate for the younger students of color.”

The “Racial Justice Award - Organization” is given occasionally to organizations whose efforts shall have produced change, or have contributed to make a change, towards ending racial injustice and promoting social equity.



Syracuse Stage
Racial Justice Award:
Organization

Syracuse Stage is a cultural anchor throughout Central New York. A nationally-recognized professional theater, Stage’s season of plays, musicals, festivals, education programs, and community events further its mission to tell stories that engage, entertain, and inspire us to see life beyond our own experience. Stage’s core values are people, passion, and curiosity and Stage actively works to engage diverse individuals, communities, ideas, and perspectives. Stage’s internal commitment to anti-racism includes the forming a board Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee and a staff working group, and offering staff trainings, discussions, book clubs to develop equity awareness in decision-making throughout the organization. Syracuse Stage has an over 20-year history of presenting plays that shine a spotlight on the challenges of racism and the on the hopes of overcoming it.