

SAYMA-URJ Report: October 16th 2021

SAYMA-Uplifting racial Justice was approved by the full body of SAYMA at Sessions 2017. (Minute # 47-26-01 Friends approved the creation of the SAYMA URJ standing committee with the vision and mission as presented in the proposal.)

In the 5 years since URJ was approved as a standing committee of SAYMA, the committee has received little support from SAYMA, its clerks, and committees, such as Ministry and Nurture and Peace and Social Concerns, or its membership Meetings. On the contrary, every racist/white supremacist derailment scheme has been deployed to suppress and oppress SAYMA-URJ and its members—all of whom are Black and Indigenous people of color (BIPOC)--beginning during the earliest ad hoc formation stages. Even those few Friends—white Friends (WF) and Friends of color (FOC)—who openly supported URJ's ministry have been systematically sidelined, in order to uphold systemic racism/white supremacy among Friends.

All SAYMA FOC who participated in the URJ formation process, agreed that URJ should be structured as a Friends of color only committee. The rationale was the same as that of early Friends, who established separate worship groups and business Meetings for men and women. The idea was to prevent patriarchal men from having oversight of the women's business and spiritual discernment. This system was specifically designed to empower Quaker women, and it worked quite well. Because there was no question that the Religious Society of Friends is a white supremacist/racist institution, it was thought that Friends of color should have the same type of structure in order to support, advocate for, and empower Friends of color.

However, due to the systemic and institutional nature of white supremacy culture and settler colonialism, White people who have been socialized to believe they are somehow superior, always right, and always suspicious of people of color they cannot supervise and/or police, a few so-called weighty SAYMA Friends have been allowed to consistently and relentlessly raise concerns about URJ's ministry, membership and finances, while most other SAYMA Friends have remained quietly complicit with their racist intentions and leadings.

Ever since URJ was established as a Friends of color only committee, the same Friends have tried to sabotage URJ by nefarious means, such as making multiple false accusations against URJ members, questioning whether URJ is following its mission, hindering URJ's ability to communicate and organize with FOC, even censoring URJ reports without our knowledge or participation, and withheld URJ funds, for no real reason other than systemically racist ones. Most of which, is well documented in previous YM minutes, and financial reports.

These obstructionist tactics have occurred with such regularity, that it is impossible to cite them all here. But, the message is very clear, that SAYMA is not really interested in

becoming an anti-racist multicultural faith community that is welcoming to diverse peoples of color, despite all your posturing to the contrary. It is quite obvious, to anyone observing SAYMA from an anti-racist perspective, that SAYMA only accepts FOC who willingly assimilate, do not question, never challenge your white supremacist norms and structures, and/or are willing to act as gatekeepers for white supremacy.

Your racist actions against members of URJ more than explain why it has been so difficult for SAYMA to find Friends of color who are willing to serve on any SAYMA committees, especially URJ. If you really think people of color who might be curious about Quakerism, would be encouraged by observing the blatantly racist and unfriendly way you treat members of URJ, you are not only mistaken, but also delusional.

That is why, my first anti-racist act as clerk of URJ was to take the URJ nominating process out of the hands of the all-White Nominating Committee, and place it with URJ, where it rightly belongs. As clerk of URJ, I recruited people of color who were already spirit led activists and organizers, and already worshipping in the manner of Friends, outside of SAYMA's racist structure, to serve as URJ members.

Together, we created the Paul Cuffee Worship Group, as a safe worship space for people of color who wish to worship in the manner of Friends, without having to deal with the constant barrage of white fragility, micro-aggressions and general white f*ckery, which all Friends of color are confronted by whenever we enter white-centered spaces. Quaker Meetings are no exception.

Naturally, some SAYMA Friends are uncomfortable with that fact. So they incessantly complain that the PCWG cannot be a "legitimate" part of SAYMA unless we are willing to put ourselves under the care of a white-centered SAYMA monthly Meeting. However, regardless of what is written in SAYMA Faith and Practice—which is continually being updated to better reflect the times we live in, anyway--the decision to form the Paul Cuffee Worship Group was absolutely Spirit-led and properly approved by URJ, in fulfillment of URJ's mission, to provide "a safe space for Friends of color to bring issues and concerns regarding racism," for FOC who want and/or need that. URJ was united in the decision that no white people should have oversight over what Friends of color choose to do, for and with each other, how we chose to worship or what we chose to do with our money, as long as it is in accordance with URJ's mission and goals.

Therefore, the best anti-racist thing Quaker nay-sayers can do, is accept URJ's leadings as continuing revelation, and affirm them as anti-racist acts. FOC should absolutely be allowed to decide for ourselves, how and under what conditions we choose to worship together, and with whom. Whether you accept the Paul Cuffee Worship Group or not, is irrelevant, as the PCWG was founded by URJ, and URJ is part of SAYMA, whether a few racist Friends like it or not.

Therefore, the Paul Cuffee Worship Group should be properly listed on the SAYMA website, along with other worship groups, including contact information so that other Friends of color are able to find us. Because, it is the right thing to do. And because, doing the right thing for Friends of color, sends a positive message to any people of color who might be curious about Quakerism, that SAYMA is sincere about evolving away from its white supremacist colonizer heritage.

URJ should also be given the funds we asked for. It is telling that, every time URJ has requested funds, there is an argument about whether SAYMA should give a portion of its “undesignated equity,” or surplus funds to Uplifting Racial Justice. That, URJ’s spending decisions are always over scrutinized and complained about, even though URJ has ALWAYS allocated its funds in compliance with its mission and goals. Whenever a few racist Friends could not find something wrong with us, they have literally invented problems to complain about. Even when their accusations are proven to be completely unfounded, they still complain. You should know, that treating people of color like criminals when we are doing nothing wrong, is a common racist practice. It is racist, by definition. Furthermore, it will not inspire confidence in SAYMA’s oft-stated proclamations, about undoing its racism and settler colonialism, as long as you refuse to give URJ the funds needed to fulfill its mission.

Digging in your heels over whether FOC should enjoy the same “self-determination” as White Friends, clearly sends the wrong message to any potential Friends of color.

URJ is in agreement, that how FOC choose to interpret the Mission of SAYMA-Uplifting Racial Justice, how we choose to conduct the committee’s business, and what we decide to spend our money on, should be none of your business--as long as we are doing nothing illegal—which we are not and have not. Remember, all the false accusations against URJ were proven false. Therefore those Friends who continue to insist that SAYMA must have more layers of regulation and oversight--which SAYMA never needed before URJ existed—should be made aware that continuing down that path is clearly motivated by racism.

Racism = Racial Prejudice + Institutional Power.

Racism = White Supremacy

White supremacy is maintained by controlling the narratives, processes and resources. And by good well-meaning people who obey unjust laws, policies, procedures, and social conventions.

Now, you have a choice. You can choose to be part of the solution, or continue to be part of the problem. You can choose to STOP looking for reasons to be suspicious of us, stop trying to make a federal case over stupid sh*t, and stop trying to oversee everything about Friends of color. No White settler colonist is qualified to judge us. So STOP policing us. We are NOT your pet Negroes.

But we can be Friends IF you are willing to treat us with the decency and respect we are due, as fellow human beings and as Friends.

If you don't understand our reasons for making the choices we have made, ASK. The worst thing you can do is to jump to conclusions about someone, or to blindly believe every negative thing you hear from others, without finding out the facts aka the truth, first. It's just not Friendly to do otherwise.

If you believe that Black lives matter, or you are striving to live in right relationship with Indigenous peoples, yet URJ's survival doesn't matter to you, you are worse than disingenuous. You are a fraud. LOVE is what you DO, not what you say.

Actionable Items: URJ Funding Requests

Funding Request—SAYMA URJ has had no funding since 2018!

#1. URJ Requests \$10,000 of set-aside funds for fiscal year 2022.

A. In addition, URJ is requesting an annual budget of \$10,000 each year, or unless URJ requests a different amount.

#2. As per recommendations from the FGC Institutional Assessment of Systemic Racism, to create an endowment to provide funding for people of color engaged in social change, anti-racism and/or counter-colonial work, URJ is soliciting donor restricted funds from individual Friends and Monthly Meetings for its **Uplifting Racial Justice Fund**. The Racial Justice Fund will enable URJ to provide support for Friends of Color to participate in SAYMA and FGC sponsored events, including sponsoring their own events and projects in support of people of color who are engaged in anti-racism work and/or most impacted by systemic white supremacy and settler colonialism.

White supremacy is maintained by controlling the NARRATIVE, the PROCESSES and all RESOURCES. Therefore, SAYMA can only become an anti-racist faith community by giving Friends of color the budget URJ requests and the freedom to allocate those resources in accordance with URJ's mission and goals.

#3. During the time of an ongoing pandemic, we know that BIPOC are disproportionately impacted both economically and medically. Therefore, URJ also requests that Friends donate the money they might have spent to attend the Yearly Meeting, Pendle Hill retreats and/or FGC Gathering to the Uplifting Racial Justice Fund.

URJ has made the same requests repeatedly, with little success, therefore URJ asks that the clerks and representatives assist URJ with fundraising by encouraging SAYMA Friends to donate their unused travel funds to the **Uplifting Racial Justice Fund**.

URJ approved on 10.13.2021

Submitted by Star Smith, Clerk of URJ

Post Script: At the SAYMA Representative Meeting today, the SAYMA clerk, removed the Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) Committee report from the agenda, just before the Meeting, because he deemed another issue more important—for the third time in a row. This time, he felt that a discussion about “SAYMA’s Existential Crisis” was a more pressing matter for SAYMA Friends to discuss than the Uplifting Racial Justice Report.

Note: the so-called existential crisis was never clearly defined. So I, as clerk of URJ, asked to have it recorded, that this was the third (3rd) time the URJ report had been removed from the agenda by this clerk. And guess what? They argued for about 20 minutes, or more, about whether I am still the clerk of URJ—even though URJ clearly spoke to that issue in its current report.

Then, when I expressed my outrage at the blatant racial discrimination I was witnessing, I was told my outrage was not Spirit-led.

Ya can’t make this stuff up. ;-)

Interviewer: How does it feel to be referred to as an "existential threat" to Quakerism?

Me: Wow. That's pretty awesome. It tells me that my counter-colonial/anti-racism ministry is on the right track, that we are making progress.