

Epistle from SAYMA Friends of Color*

June 2023

Dear Friends:

“White rage is not about visible violence, but rather it works its way through the courts. The legislatures, and a range of government bureaucracies. It wreaks havoc subtly, almost imperceptibly. ... White rage doesn’t have to wear sheets, burn crosses, or take to the streets. Working the halls of power, it can achieve its ends far more effectively, far more destructively. ... **The trigger for white rage, inevitably, is Black advancement. It is not the mere presence of Black people that is the problem; rather, it is Blackness with ambition. With drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and with demands for full and equal citizenship. It is Blackness that refuses to accept subjugation, to give up.** A formidable array of policy assaults and legal contortions, has consistently punished Black resilience, Black resolve.”

From **“White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide”**, by Carol Anderson, Ph.D. (p. 3)

Unfortunately, Black and Indigenous Friends of color (BIFOC), have been subjected to this type of quiet racism, ever since the earliest days of Friends in the Americas, right up to the present day. It is abundantly clear that racism is operating in SAYMA, right now. We see white domination, aka racism, enacted through SAYMA’s formal and informal business processes, overtly and covertly. We have witnessed the spiritual gifts and spirit-led activism of Black and indigenous Friends of color (BIFOC) maligned and suppressed, and our continuing revelations (spirit-led initiatives) effectively undermined through various un-Friendly means.

Since the formation stages of the SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) committee, BIFOC have been viciously attacked, with impunity. Every anti-racist initiative SAYMA-URJ has brought forward has been met with resistance and white outrage. BIFOC who have been doing exactly what they are called to do to address longstanding issues of racism among Friends, have been called liars, con artists, bullies, and abusers, basically over **differences of opinion**—as to what racism is, how it operates, specifically among Friends, and strategies to address it--which is to say, no good reason, whatsoever.

Worse than that, SAYMA BIFOC have been tokenized and pitted against one another over issues of race, repeatedly, in order to discourage us from connecting with one another in fellowship, possibly finding unity with one another concerning matters of race and racism, or acting with unified spirit-led purpose, as Friends of color. Every trick in the white supremacist playbook has been employed to keep BIFOC separated, and divided against one another. Yet, to this day, not one single white Friend who has engaged in these racist activities has been held accountable for

the harms they have caused to BIFOC. And, the specific Friends of color who have been targeted by Quaker racists, have yet to receive anything resembling restorative justice. In fact, a few SAYMA Friends, in positions of responsibility still promote the false idea that SAYMA-Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) is responsible for the reluctance of a few remaining SAYMA BIPOC to participate in SAYMA activities. Some have even questioned whether SAYMA-URJ is owed an apology for being treated so poorly, by the very Quakers who say they are committed to becoming an anti-racist faith community.

But, how is that ever going to happen, IF no white Friend is ever accountable for the racist harm they cause? How will you meet your diversity goals, IF you are not willing to act in a fair and equitable manner with regard to BIFOC?

Fundamentally, anti-racist praxis involves empowering BIPOC, respecting our unique interpretation of Quaker Testimonies, and expressions of faith, and practice, based on our lived experience and insight as Friends of color. Anti-racist praxis should be about holding white people accountable for their racist behaviors.

Quakers should already know love is what you DO, not how you feel or what you say. Yet, in order for BIPOC to be considered worthy of inclusion into white Quaker spaces, we expected to accept your white Eurocentric colonizing racially biased preconditions, social norms, and protocols, instead of encouraged to be our culturally specific selves. You expect us to make you feel “safe”, as you threaten us with your Eurocentric colonial white sense of superiority, and your European cultural addiction to exploitation, control, and domination.

Friends cannot expect to reduce people’s gifts and leadings to something you can effectively white-manage if you really intend to meet your diversity goals. Because, it is simply not possible to build relationships of trust with people you do not respect. Again, as Quakers, you should already know this.

It is a well-known fact, verified by studying Quaker history, that the Religious Society of Friends has been a white supremacist organization from its inception. Historically, Friends have not seen BIPOC as fully human, but ripe for exploitation and oppression. Quakers profited from slavery and human trafficking by trading both Africans and Indigenous Americans. Quakers collaborated with the US government to steal indigenous peoples’ children in order to assimilate them or kill them, in Quaker Indian boarding schools, through adoption, and/or foster care agencies. Quakers profited by dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their ancestral lands, communities, languages and lifeways.

Many Friends are struggling with these historical facts, and this struggle may be where the Friendly desire to become anti-racist Quaker Meetings originates. Except, current patterns of racism practiced across the Quaker world, clearly demonstrate that the sense of the predominantly white Quaker community at large, is just not there yet. Prerequisite structural changes have been so slow and incremental that your integrity must now be called into

question.

We know white people have been socialized to believe your pathological and predatory Eurocentric ways are superior. You've been taught that you are better, and more deserving of "the pursuit of happiness" than the Natives whose land your ancestors stole, and the Black people your ancestors enslaved. Far too many of you still think you are better than the BIPOC you say you want to be your Friends.

Meanwhile, all BIPOC have learned from generations of experience, that white people are culturally addicted to exploitation and control. We've seen how you treat BIPOC who dare to approach you as equals or do not share your inflated opinion of yourselves. Yet still try to deny that YOUR RACISM is the problem, and NOT the behavior of any BIFOC's spirit-led anti-racist activism, or any BIFOC who dares to call you on your conscious or unconscious racism.

Though some Friends claim they want multicultural "diversity" and "inclusion", they are still extraordinarily reluctant to accommodate multicultural understandings and expressions of Quaker faith, worship, and practice. SAYMA Friends of color, along with a few white Friends who are brave enough to support our efforts toward racial justice, have borne the brunt of your white rage for far too long. People's lives are on the line while you dither about where you stand on issues of racial justice, and we have had enough. It is past time for Quakers to honestly and openly face your white supremacist colonial past, admit you are addicted to the power your whiteness affords you, and BE the CHANGE you say you want to be, or face the fact that you are racists.

According to the SAYMA Friends of color we spoke with, patterns of white supremacist behavior show up in SAYMA in the following ways:

1. Controlling the narratives, processes, and resources are the primary ways white supremacy is maintained among Friends. White Supremacy (WS) is also maintained by well-meaning Friends who enable unjust laws, rules, policies, procedures, and social conventions to continue, without question or challenge.
2. Racist Quakers are responsible for instigating conflict and division between Friends of color by pitting FOC against one another. They practice a colonial policy of "divide and rule" in order to serve their racist agendas, and to derail URJ's efforts to build a harmonious spiritual community with SAYMA FOC, consciously, and unconsciously. (Note: Quakers have not treated LGBTQ+, women's, children's or environmental justice groups the same way they have treated Friends of color.)

White Friends continue to ask what you can DO to be more welcoming to diverse peoples of color, yet SAYMA FOC have already told you what they want/need to feel welcome among Friends. SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ)'s vision and Mission were approved, by SAYMA FOC before they were approved by the body of SAYMA in 2017, yet SAYMA has yet to support URJ's work, financially or spiritually. EVERYTHING URJ has tried to do in fulfillment of its vision,

mission, and goals has been undermined by racist actors in positions of responsibility, and so far, no one has admitted responsibility, apologized, or been held accountable.

Vision: SAYMA-URJ envisions a Yearly Meeting community where every Friend of color feels welcome. We see a SAYMA community where the divine Light within every Friend of color is affirmed, their unique history, spiritual journey, and lived Truth is honored, where our messages and concerns are heard and respected with due consideration. We see a SAYMA community where Friends of color are empowered to build close spiritual Friendships, appreciation, love, and support for the weighty responsibilities we carry as people of color, embodying Quaker Testimonies. Within and outside of the Religious Society of Friends.

Mission: To help SAYMA become a welcoming place for Friends of color. The committee will do this by providing safe space for Friends of color to bring issues and concerns regarding racism within their Monthly Meetings and SAYMA, to find support and advocacy. The committee will also work to raise awareness about White Supremacy aka racism within SAYMA, by compiling and disseminating educational resources.

“If you are neutral in a situation of injustice, you have sided with the oppressor.”
--Desmond Tutu

Therefore, IF you are serious about becoming an anti-racist multicultural faith community qualified to welcome diverse peoples of color and families, without re-traumatizing them with your uniquely Quaker brand of disingenuous Friendship, the following good faith action steps are for you. As always, the choice is yours. But please, DO NOT dare to say out loud that SAYMA is an anti-racist community Friendly to any Black and/or Indigenous people if you should choose not to follow the action steps laid out for you by SAYMA’s Black and Indigenous Friends of color.

1. No Quaker individual, committee, or Meeting can be neutral in the face of racial injustice and expect to be anti-racist. Therefore, White Friends must practice noticing patterns of racist behavior within Quaker meetings and speak out against the racism they see, within and beyond the Quaker context.
2. As victims of racism among Friends, we have a human right to “name names” and “point fingers” at those individual Friends, communities, organizations or committees who are sustaining white supremacy/racism, thereby causing harm to FOC. How bad could it possibly be for white Friends to face their fear and shame when they are called on their racism?
3. Controlling financial resources is one of the primary ways white supremacy is maintained. Therefore, Finance Committee's business should be open and transparent; no longer confidential. Any Friend should be welcome to attend Finance Committee meetings.

4. All efforts possible, should be made to help SAYMA Friends understand how internalized oppression: both “internalized superiority” and “internalized inferiority”, impact SAYMA’s progress toward becoming an anti-racist faith community. This is about how white people change their relationship to racist ideology and white power.
5. White Quakers must accept responsibility/accountability for racist Quakers, your racist/colonizing presence, and legacy. Clerks are present to keep Quaker order, not to allow racist attacks against FOC or take sides in disagreements between BIPOC. In fact, Quaker clerks/committees perpetuate racism whenever they permit racism, by inaction.
6. FOC expect a cessation of mean-spirited racist attacks against FOC— especially attacks against FOC engaged in anti-racist analysis and organizing among Friends. This behavior is usually in defense of fragile white feelings, and it must be stopped, because any Friend who feels they are being abused by the Truth is no Friend, at all.
7. SAYMA Friends must accept the reality that racist Quakers are responsible for instigating conflict and division between FOC, by pitting FOC against one another, playing “divide and rule”, tokenizing, scapegoating, etc., in order to derail our efforts to build spiritual community with one another and find unity. This covert racist organizing can easily be stopped by exposing the individual Friends engaged in it and encouraging FOC to resolve whatever artificially contrived conflicts we may have.
8. White Friends must respect BIPOC’s diverse cultural frameworks, modes of expression, and our various ongoing legacies of resistance to oppression, anti-racist counter-colonial organizing, and activism.
9. We are really tired of hearing about white people’s hurt feelings and being accused of bullying for speaking the truth. We have observed that white people never care about the feelings of BIPOC you are oppressing and/or exploiting. Racism is about white power and domination, not about your fake fragile hurt feelings. Therefore, white people’s feelings cannot be central to the work of dismantling racism/white supremacy among Quakers. Seriously, what kind of Friends are harmed by Truth?

“If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.

This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted

with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

--Frederick Douglass, August 3, 1857

In Friendship,

* Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association (SAYMA)

Note: This epistle was drafted and approved by SAYMA Friends of color who participated in SAYMA’s Racial Conflict Transformation Program. The SAYMA Racial Conflict Transformation Program was developed specifically for Quakers by Sharon “Star” Smith, clerk of SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ), and facilitated by the SAYMA Racial Conflict Transformation Team, with approval from the wider body of SAYMA. The epistle above was read and accepted into the record at SAYMA yearly meeting 2023, on June 27th. Please note that not all SAYMA Friends or Friends of color chose to participate in the program.