

SAYMA-Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) Report—June 2021*

SAYMA-URJ, was led to identify and address manifestations of white supremacy/racism, which Friends of color have experienced within SAYMA. To that end, URJ offers the following assessment, in the Spirit of integrity and truth, and asks that the yearly meeting sit with the following queries as you read it:

1. What can we CHANGE to make SAYMA a Friendly and welcoming place for diverse peoples of color—not just the tiny minority of Friends of color white people are comfortable with, but all people of color who are led to live in the manner of Friends?
2. How can Friends adapt/modify Quaker Practice and processes to be inclusive and welcoming of diverse cultural expressions of faith, as opposed to expecting culturally diverse peoples to conform to white/Eurocentric colonizer cultural norms and practices?

To be clear, an assessment is not meant as a condemnation or indictment; but it is constructive criticism of SAYMA. It is a constructive critique based on the observations of knowledgeable Friends of color regarding the yearly meeting's progress toward becoming a multicultural anti-racist faith community--which is an absolutely appropriate role for SAYMA-URJ.

First, SAYMA-URJ wants the YM to understand and acknowledge that we are at the beginning of a process to dismantle white supremacy/European colonialism within the SAYMA Meeting community, and that we are nowhere near completion. We offer this assessment as evidence thereof. The assessment tool we have used is based on the "Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Institution" as detailed in "Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America" by Joseph Barnt. (Rev. Barndt is one of the founders of Crossroads and the People's Institute.)

According to URJ's observations, SAYMA has yet to get beyond stage two (2) of the six (6) stage continuum, in the last five (5) years, since URJ was approved as a standing committee of SAYMA. Stage two is described as:

- Publicly obeys the laws of desegregation; removes signs of intentional exclusion.
 - Is tolerant of a limited number of people of color with 'proper' perspective and credentials.
- BUT...
- [The] White constituency is still exclusive and paternalistic in its attitudes and actions, and often declares, "We don't have a problem."
 - Continues [its] self-understanding in [of the] organizational structure and mission as a white institution serving a predominantly white constituency.
 - Continues to maintain White power and privilege through its de facto policies and practices, teachings and decision making on all levels of institutional life.
 - May still secretly limit or exclude people of color in contradiction to public policies.

We think SAYMA wants to progress to stage three but it was clear to us you are not there yet. We encourage you to read the book and consider why we decided y'all have been stuck in stage two for so long.

The following describes just a few racist patterns of behavior URJ members have seen and been subjected to, which coincide with stage two of the continuum. Please remember that we are discussing the yearly meeting as an institution, not any particular individuals who control the levers of white power and control within it.

Scapegoating: Blaming the Messenger--Any Friend of color who points out white supremacist colonizer behavior occurring within SAYMA Meetings is either dismissed as wrong, irrelevant or hostile. This speaks to Friends in positions of authority who still refuse to acknowledge or accept SAYMA-URJ's construction as a Friends of color only committee, over which they have no oversight. These Friends continually try to undermine the committee's work because they are uncomfortable with not having control of who URJ's members are and how they are chosen. They especially don't like not having control of URJ's spiritual discernment process concerning how URJ interprets and fulfills its mission and goals. Since they cannot control URJ, they seek to undermine its work by nefarious means. This is exactly how white supremacy works, systemically.

URJ members have been accused of conflicts of interest, fraud, theft, misappropriation of funds, of abuse, bullying and name-calling. Some of us have even had our ancestral lineage called into question. All for simply acting in accordance with URJ's SAYMA approved mission and goals, outside of their oversight. Seriously. URJ members were accused of "conflicts of interests" even though SAYMA never had, nor needed a conflict of interest policy before. URJ members were falsely accused of financial malfeasance, for spending our own set aside funds in absolute compliance with the committee's mission and goals. Then, even though the matter was investigated by Finance--and no wrongdoing was found--the accusations have persisted, and URJ's funding has been affected, as a direct result.

So-called weighty white Friends have constantly inserted themselves into conflicts between Friends of color, where they should have known not to. They have taken advantage of minor, often petty and personal conflicts to pit Friends of color against one other, simply to undermine URJ members and URJ's ability to fulfill its mission. SAYMA-URJ could easily have resolved any conflict between Friends of color, if we were trusted to do so. But instead, a few angry white Friends have been allowed to weaponize their white crocodile tears, in order to prompt a few misguided and already traumatized Friends of color to speak out against URJ and its members, against their own interests. That just two Black men, were encouraged—more like they were set up--to falsely claim they spoke for all Black Friends—not even all Friends of color, mind you. They spoke out in the September Representative Meeting, calling for URJ to be laid down and defunded, and said they did not want to participate in the racial conflict transformation process, which URJ had been requesting for many months. That they did so, without bringing their concerns to URJ first, is a perfect example of how racism works within every

predominantly white institution, by tokenizing a few people of color to act as gatekeepers, upholding white supremacy.

So, we ask, what kind of Friendship is that? When has a Meeting or Quaker organization ever canceled an activity or program, just because two Friends chose not to participate--for any reason? This behavior alone exposes, that the entire goal of these so-called weighty Friends in positions of authority, who emotionally manipulated a few SAYMA Friends of color to act against their own interests, was a racist strategy to destabilize and destroy URJ's ability to fulfill its mission--simply because URJ will not allow them to control us. This is a textbook example of how white supremacy is maintained among Friends.

Tone Policing: White Friends harass, try to intimidate, belittle, patronize, and demean Friends of color engaged in Anti-racism work until those Friends of Color react with anger, as is natural. Then we are told we must be polite and Friendly to people who clearly mean us harm. You make no allowance for Friends of Color to express themselves in their own culturally relevant styles of expression if it makes racist white Friends uncomfortable or nervous, going so far as to equate expressions you don't like as "evil." Yet, y'all commit constant micro-aggressions and micro-assaults against Friends of color, shrug it off as harmless, then get angry and say you are being victimized when Friends of Color defend themselves and/or point out your racist behavior to you. That's not OK—and it is racist.

Then you say you are committed to making our Meeting a safe and welcoming place for people of color. Do you see the problem here?

Dismissal of Authority: You "disagree" with anyone who names the racism/white supremacy all around us, even when those observations are made by persons trained to identify and disrupt white supremacy, especially if the expert is a Friend of Color. You dismiss and disparage such observations, and categorically deny the possibility that you are in fact, racist. YET, that is exactly what "Racism Denial" is.

You have even dared to employ racist colonial metrics to challenge the legitimacy and cultural authority of Friends of color who identify as Indigenous, in order to avoid accountability.

Then you say you are committed to making our Meeting a safe and welcoming place for people of color. Do you see what the problem is?

Imposition of Power: Entirely new practices and processes have been created which are completely outside of good Quaker order, solely for the purpose of oppressing Friends of Color. Several so-called weighty White Friends have been engaged in covert organizing activities against SAYMA Friends of color they don't like, just because they want control over URJ's approach to the anti-racism work we feel SAYMA needs to do. In addition, the vast majority of conflict-averse white Friends never stand in opposition to these obvious violations of proper order. Nor do they attempt to support and/or defend Friends of color when they/we are

literally experiencing racist attacks, leaving them/us to fend for ourselves. Then, the extreme few white Friends, brave enough try to stand up to Quaker racists in SAYMA Meetings, come under attack themselves.

News Flash: This is NOT the way to dismantle white supremacy/colonialism, which simply cannot be done without discomfort, challenge or conflict. Do you see the problem?

Y'all insist on maintaining Quaker traditions, on doing things as they have always been done, instead of being open to **continuing revelation**, or new anti-racist insights and leadings from Friends of color, despite the fact that becoming an anti-racist multicultural faith community requires CHANGE. Worse than that, you want to control the change to suit your white comfort and convenience. You still refuse to let go of your internalized white supremacist addiction to control the narratives, processes and resources regarding, even the anti-racism work of SAYMA. And, you consistently undermine and attack those Friends of color who have been spirit led to labor with you and your racism, to provide the necessary knowledgeable leadership in the work of dismantling white supremacy/colonialism among Friends. Even as you are learning that you should follow the leadership of knowledgeable people of color, you still think you are qualified to decide who those leaders should be, whether they are willing, or led to do this work, or not.

News Flash: The reason you have such difficulty finding Friends of color to fill those roles is entirely due to your controlling white supremacist behavior toward the few, who are willing to confront you on your racism. You need to understand, that it is much easier for Friends of color who do not wish to serve on your committees or on URJ, to blame URJ and its clerk for their reluctance than it is for them to stand up to your racism, themselves. We're pretty sure they will I tell you whatever they think you want hear, just to avoid participating in your white-led anti-racism process.

Then you say you are committed to making our Meeting a safe and welcoming place for people of color.

Judgmentalism: You really think you can decide which Friends of Color are not Quakers, without engaging those Friends in any kind of clearness process. You have judged the spiritual discernment process of URJ (Friends of color) to be inadequate, when you have no idea how URJ manages its internal decision making process. If we attempt to change or even question your white supremacist meeting structure, you refuse to accept, or cooperate with URJ's spirit led discernment and choices for creating safety, comfort and welcome, for potential Friends of color--which is absolutely in alignment with URJ's mission. This is what is behind SAYMA's insistence that the Paul Cuffee Worship Group cannot be part of SAYMA because we chose not to be under the care, or oversight, of a predominantly white SAYMA Meeting. This is also what is behind the complaints of some, that SAYMA-URJ members must be members of recognized SAYMA Monthly Meetings and nominated by an all-white nominating committee. That's just plain old racist, by definition.

Then you say you are committed to making our Meeting a safe and welcoming place for people of color.

Lastly, We should never forget, that white supremacy is maintained by controlling the narratives, processes and resources, and by well-meaning good people who obey unjust laws, policies, practices, procedures and social conventions.

A quick perusal of SAYMA faith ad practice proves URJ's assessment is accurate:

From SAYMA Faith and Practice:

The Religious Society of Friends recognizes that all are called to minister in obedience to the living Spirit, whether through service, preaching, teaching, hospitality or administration. All ministries are seen as important for the well-ordered functioning of the spiritual body. All Friends have particular gifts and qualities to bring, and all are called to find their place of service.

Friends believe in the power of love to evoke the inherent worth of others. We are called to accept and love all persons in spite of transgressions, confrontations, or apparent differences. ... Friends aim toward the transformation of a flawed world into one that would make possible equality, justice and peace for all peoples. (p.15)

Under Monthly Meeting Committees:

Ministry and Counsel is responsible for the quality of the Meeting for Worship, for the religious development of members and attendees. ... They also encourage those whose ministry frequently speaks to the spiritual needs of themselves and fellow worshippers...

Material need. This committee, or one especially appointed for the purpose, will try to provide for those in need of financial assistance. Meetings are advised to exercise tactful and watchful care in ascertaining and meeting these needs. (Pages 21-23)

Functions of the Yearly Meeting—Ministry and Nurture Committee

...involvement in sensitive situations... (Ministry and Nurture has totally failed in this, though that is slowly beginning to change—emphasis on slowly-- with new blood on SAYMA Ministry and Nurture.)

Facilitating clearness and accountability for Friends seeking endorsement by the yearly meeting for ministry to which they are called; (M&N has utterly failed to hold anyone accountable for the racist harms Friends of color have suffered, or to endorse the ministries of Friends of color.)

Providing a clearness process and holding accountable released Friends who receive financial assistance from SAYMA's Released Friend Fund.

Administering the disbursement and accounting of the Spiritual Development Fund. (p.27)

Membership: Membership in the Religious Society of Friends identifies a person who seeks, in worship after the manner of Friends, the living reality, discipline, and guidance of the spirit of God. No prescribed or set formula of words and phrases distinguishes a member from a non-member; the lives of Friends express their faith in accordance with their experiences with Truth and with the meeting community. (P. 33)

Advice from SAYMA 2016, which SAYMA has yet to follow

Statement of intention for the SAYMA 2016 theme: We come together with the theme of “Unraveling Racism” to communicate “heart to heart” in an effort to live up to our testimonies of equality, community, and integrity, make SAYMA a more welcoming spiritual home for all, and seek justice while healing our communities.

DO:

Listen to the lived experience of Friends of color!

Be mindful that Friends of color have to live with the impact of white supremacy in their daily lives.

Be open to diverse manners of expression. For example, Friends of various cultural backgrounds may raise their voices while speaking passionately about a topic with no intention of offending anyone.

Process your feelings with other White Friends by holding each other accountable to educate yourselves, change behavior, and take more action against racism.

Don't:

Make Friends of color spokespeople for everyone of their race.

Ask Friends of color to relieve your feelings of guilt.

Ask Friends of color to affirm your good intentions.

Credit for Statement of Purpose for SAYMA theme: by Susan Firestone, and Sharon Smith, approved by SAYMA Yearly Meeting Planning Committee.

Credit for Advice for European American Friends: adapted for SAYMA by Susan Firestone, Folami Adams and Sharon Smith from “Advice for European Americans” handout from the interest group for European Americans Working on Racism at FGC 2015 Gathering.

Actionable Items: URJ Requests

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

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

B. In addition, URJ is requesting a line item in SAYMA's annual budget of \$10,000 each year, or unless URJ requests a different amount.

C. 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.

D. 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 requested and the freedom to allocate those resources in accordance with URJ's mission and goals.

E. During the time of the 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 requested this before, 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.

#2. URJ asks SAYMA to return to the racial conflict transformation process, facilitated by the Friends Center for Racial Justice. Just because two Friends of color decided not to participate is no excuse for it not to continue. When have you ever seen the yearly meeting cancel an activity or process, just because a couple of white Friends chose not to participate? Using Friends of color against one another in this manner is not acceptable. It is not only abusive, but also a function of white supremacy/racism, and not OK, by any measure.

#3. Officially recognize the Paul Cuffee Worship group as part of SAYMA.

Approved by SAYMA-URJ and submitted on February 26th by Sharon "Star" Smith, clerk of URJ

* Edited and resubmitted for the June SAYMA 2021 Virtual Gathering, because no parts of URJ's report were addressed at the March Representative Meeting.

Sharon "Star" Smith, clerk of URJ