

# SAYMA-URJ Assessment of September 2019 Rep's Meeting

## Clerks Report

Three members of Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) represented the committee at the September Representative Meeting in Knoxville TN: Star Smith, clerk, Max Parthas and Tribal Raine. Once URJ submitted its report and finance request in advance of the Meeting, we suspected there would likely be controversy, even conflict. Why? Because the same issues have been contentious since the formation stages of URJ: Control of URJ's money and membership. So, what we witnessed there did not a surprise us at all.

In the report, URJ requested \$10,000 and financial autonomy from the yearly meeting, in accordance with URJ's Mission and Goals. URJ also declared itself a self-selecting committee—meaning the committee will approve its own members, instead of being selected by the Nominating Committee and approved by SAYMA.

URJ created the **Paul Cuffee Friends of Color Worship Group** in fulfillment of URJ's mission to "provide 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 Paul Cuffee Worship Group acts as a Meeting community for people of color who wish to Worship in the manner of Friends, if/when they are uncomfortable doing so in SAYMA's all or mostly white Quaker Meetings. URJ named the worship group after Paul Cuffee (1754-1812), because two members of URJ, are direct descendants.

URJ also announced the establishment of a partnership with **the Abolitionist Center**, in Sumter SC. SAYMA-URJ and the Abolitionist Center share work and living space. It is also where the Paul Cuffee Worship Group meets for Worship. As part of the partnership agreement URJ committed to financially support the Abolitionist Center's work.

In addition, URJ made the following recommendations, borrowing heavily from the Friends General Conference Institutional Assessment of Systemic Racism:

1. That All SAYMA decision-making processes, consider the following query with respect to each decision, "How does this decision support FGC and SAYMA's goal to transform into an actively anti-racist faith community?"
2. Ask Monthly Meetings to collect and provide demographics of their Meetings that include age and race. Collecting this data will help us track our progress, or lack thereof.
3. Seek funding to implement URJ's recommendations including but not limited to:
  - A. Create an endowment to provide funding for People of Color engaged in social change, anti-racism and/or counter-colonial work. URJ has already created an entity called, the Racial Justice Fund. All it needs now is financing.
  - B. Increase the capacity and financial resources of SAYMA-URJ to provide anti-racism learning [and practice] opportunities for Monthly Meetings, and provide enough resources to assist Friends of Color serving SAYMA by working with URJ.
  - C. Increase the Racial Justice Fund, which 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.

4. Examine and change Quaker traditions, language and processes developed by white supremacist Quakers to be inclusive of other cultures, and conduct a detailed review of SAYMA Faith and Practice, policy & procedures with a view to considering the intentional and unintended impact and consequences on the participation of Friends of Color.

5. Commit to solving the barriers People of Color face that preclude them from fully functioning as SAYMA Friends. In other words, DO better.

URJ ended its report with the following statement:

Any plan for racial justice must include economic justice. If you do not comprehend what we are saying or why, please Google “the racial wealth gap.” URJ asks that you give generously, according to your capacity, to those most impacted by racial economic disparities and that you let go of your need to control what is done with those funds.

SAYMA-URJ is bursting with talent, ideas and commitment to the cause of uplifting racial justice and must have ample funds to implement SAYMA-URJ’s Vision, Mission and Goals.

Lastly, every person of color who survives the relentless onslaught of white supremacy is already doing their part, every day, to challenge and dismantle it. We (URJ) have put our lives, livelihoods and health at risk to work with White Friends who say they want to dismantle their racism, so the very least you can do is support our initiatives. Because, there is so much SAYMA-URJ can accomplish in the name of Friends, with enough money.

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What can I say...SAYMA minds and hearts were already hardened before the Meeting. First, the clerk and whomever, decided--without consulting URJ--to censor parts of the URJ Report posted on the Yearly meeting website. They made a policy decision not to publish “personal information.” While I am aware that Quakers generally do not cite Friend’s names in their Meeting Minutes and reports, names are a matter of public record, NOT “personal information.” This was a missed opportunity for Friends to examine tradition, in order to respect the wishes of Friends of color to name those Friends whose influence has negatively impacted URJ’s work, thereby holding those Friends accountable for their actions.

Word got to us, weeks before the Meeting, that there was “movement” on Ministry and Nurture to remove me as clerk of URJ. We heard it was squashed before it left M&N, yet it apparently was not. Because Barbara Esther, the SAYMA clerk, asked for a private telephone Meeting with me and Ron McDonald, the M&N clerk, without telling me what the meeting was to be about. Naturally, I refused to attend unless they told me what we were to discuss.

So, on Sept 3rd, Ron McDonald sent me the following message:

“There are some strong opinions that you be removed from your position as clerk of SAYMA URJ, and your recent posts will not have a positive effect on those efforts. They read as if filled with anger and non-negotiable demands.

We want to ask you to come to the Reps meeting in a spirit of cooperation and transparency, which means coming with a sense of peace about you. Your tendency to call people names and say or write insulting things will not help, and you must be tolerant of questions about the committee and how exactly the committee money is being spent, because there are legitimate

questions still to come. We believe these questions can be answered, but won't be if you are defensive.

You seem to be saying "I don't like you folks, so I'm going to demand what I would normally ask for." That just won't fly. We believe you must befriend SAYMA Friends and keep your cool."

Wow. I don't have enough time or space here to unpack all the issues here. However, I responded that I would not attend such a meeting without my own witnesses present. And Ron, cancelled that Meeting as a result.

Question: If M&N did not approve taking action against me, was the clerk acting on his own? I shudder to think of the complaints would be leveled against me, if I was to act unilaterally as clerk of URJ. I'm just sayin.'

The issue was NOT on the agenda at the Representative's Meeting, but it was brought forward again anyway, in a way which suggests a conspiracy had been brewing. Some members of Nominating were involved, also a couple of Meetings, like Celo NC and Charleston WV. Except, by then, it was obvious to me and many others, that some SAYMA Friends were determined to characterize me, the clerk of URJ, and its Uplifting Racial Justice agenda as "the problem," instead of focusing on their own racism, as they should.

Here we have a classic case of victim blaming or scapegoating, which is a form of abuse. FYI: When white people abuse people of color its called racism. Be advised: the best way to handle abusers and racists is to call them out publicly and remove them from office.

Ultimately, with all that white foolishness going on in the background, none of URJ's requests or recommendations were addressed seriously. What Tribal described as "petulant old white men" kept asking the same tired old questions, making the same tired old demands: "Why should we give you any money when you won't tell us what you plan to do with every penny, in advance?", "How often does the worship group meet for worship?, You can't be a worship group unless you are under the care of a Meeting.", "Where are the educational materials and trainings URJ is supposed to provide for us?", "You cannot get change by shaming people!"

As I answered their questions and responded to their demands, Ron McDonald, accused me of bullying and calling people names, again. So I asked him, "What names have I called y'all?" He froze. Then Barbara Esther called for silence, rather than allow me to lead us into a deeper conversation about what was really driving this group. After which, there was no more discussion about the URJ report—and no decisions made, either.

Interesting side note concerning URJ membership: Ever since SAYMA-URJ was approved as a Yearly Meeting committee which only Friends of color can serve, it has been extremely difficult to find Friends of color willing to do the work of URJ. The prevailing narrative seems to be, "No one wants to work with Sharon "Star" Smith." When I explained that the reason SAYMA Friends of color are so unwilling to serve as URJ members, is due to the racism they would most certainly experience--exhibit A being the way I have been treated--they were genuinely shocked. So, I gave a couple of examples.

Example: SAYMA approved Lisa as clerk of URJ right after it was approved as a standing committee, knowing she was unqualified. She was brand new to Quakerism and never clerked a Quaker committee meeting in her life. When I suggested that SAYMA was sabotaging the new

committee by putting an inexperienced Friend in such a position, they filled Lisa's head with the usual anti-Sharon Smith BS. And she didn't know me any better than she knew them, so she accepted the position. Then she suddenly quit before her first year was complete, directly due to our uniquely Quaker forms of white f\*kery. Lisa was no dummy. She just did not know what she was in for. But once she realized these Quakers were attempting to groom her as their pet Negro--and other SAYMA Friends of color did not rally to support her--she got out as fast as she could. Now she is no longer a Quaker.

When I told this story, true to clueless form, Free Polazzo, the representative from Atlanta, said, "Why are you disparaging my friends?" Ya can't make this stuff up.

FYI: The presumption that I am somehow preventing "SAYMA Friends of color" from working with URJ, is reprehensible. Gaslighting is also a form of abuse. And when you gaslight people of color it becomes racism, by definition.

Based on the outrageously racist behavior we witnessed at the September SAYMA representatives Meeting, SAYMA is fortunate that I was able to convince a few people of color to serve SAYMA as URJ members. It was abundantly clear to the three of us who attended this Meeting, that these so-called Friends have lost their way. What we saw was a small group of angry old white men and a few women, like Robyn Joseph's, (Swananoah Valley Friends in Black Mountain NC) who had the gall to walk up to Max Parthas, pleasantly congratulate him for URJ's work, yet tell him "You need to replace the clerk." These Friends were bent on maintaining control of the Yearly Meeting's white supremacist Quaker processes and finances, because they had already lost control of the narrative. There was nothing open hearted, loving, or Friendly about it. The room was clearly divided between the haters and the shocked. Predictably, I was blamed for the division. Someone actually said "You are causing a 'split' between us." And another said, "OMG! This is the textbook racism I read about."

Never forget, white supremacy is maintained by controlling the narrative, the processes and resources. And, by good well-meaning people obeying unjust laws, rules, policies and social conventions.

In the end, I was not removed as SAYMA clerk because there was not enough support for it.

We did not get the \$10,000 we asked for. Someone actually said, giving URJ that money would lessen the Yearly Meeting's "surplus." But the Treasurer confirmed that she would follow the existing written policy of not delaying or withholding URJ spending as long as the funds are available in URJ's set-aside and donor restricted accounts. I asked Friends to give money to URJ's Racial Justice Fund, and got blank stares and rolled eyes in return. And there was no discussion concerning URJ setting up an independent account. So we will work with what we have, for now. Lastly, the Nominating Committee respected URJ's decision to be a self-selecting committee, by simply announcing that URJ has decided to be a self-selecting committee.

It is important to point out that not everyone was outrageously rude and un-Friendly. Many Friends that day, were loving, caring and Friendly to us. Unfortunately, not enough of them are in positions of authority or leadership. I like to think we are making progress, no matter how slow and tedious. Because each time the haters show their asses, those who are shocked by the racist behavior of their Friends are motivated to work harder and do better.

Gaslighting: Google it.

Star Smith, Clerk of URJ