

SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) Clerk's Report
RE: Fall 2023 Representative Meeting

"We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist." --James Baldwin

Dear Friends:

The meeting started out in the usual way: Waiting Worship, roll call, approving the agenda, etc. Everything was fine until it was time for the URJ Report. After the URJ report was read, some Friends were offended by the word "**dither**" in a short paragraph under Concerns. Apparently, that one word, enflamed a few white Friends so much that no other commentary about the URJ report could be made. To be honest, it looked to me like they were just looking for something, anything, to complain about.

"Concerns: (Observable Patterns) Continued resistance of some Friends in positions of responsibility, to participation in SAYMA's racial conflict transformation program. Continued hostility from a few so-called weighty Friends and Friends of color who do not support URJ, its mission, and its members. SAYMA Ministry & Nurture continues to **dither**—for more than a year--over acknowledging their part in the yearly meeting's racial conflicts, necessary apologies, and making amends, which any effort toward restorative justice requires. Therefore, URJ expects a progress report from SAYMA Ministry & Nurture. (See the full report, attached.)

First, Barbara Esther (Asheville), co-clerk of SAYMA Ministry and Nurture, said "Dither is not an appropriate word". Then Joanne Rhodes (Memphis TN), who identified herself as an AVP practitioner, said, "The word "dither" is "hostile" and "disrespectful". Wood Bolden (West Virginia) said, "Joanne speaks my mind."

Finally, Kevin Moran (the other co-clerk of SAYMA Ministry and Nurture) said, "Ministry and Nurture is not in unity." He described "a pattern of avoidance" and said, "dither is an accurate word for what is going on in the committee." Then someone looked up the word "dither" and found that it simply means "indecisive." As I suspected, these Friends were just looking for something to complain about.

Tone Policing: When the issue is race/racism and/or other forms of oppression, those who benefit from maintaining said systems of oppression often "tone police" and/or argue semantics. This is a very common derailment/avoidance tactic that racists and other oppressors employ in order to avoid addressing the contents of a message, and/or accountability for their oppressive behavior.

The Ministry and Nurture report was next on the agenda, and was presented by Barbara Esther. They reported on the Ministry and Nurture retreat. I found it fascinating that the theme of the M&N retreat was "deepening the beloved community," in light of the tone policing that had just happened. As an anti-racist Friend, when I hear the words unity, and/or beloved community, in white Quaker spaces, I read them as a dog-whistle code for compliance and conformity with

white supremacist Quaker norms and expectations. That they focused on tone policing URJ's perfectly legitimate choice of descriptive terms, only proves this theory.

In fact, after Barbara presented the M&N report, a few angry white Friends, hijacked the discussion time to engage in even more tone policing, and pontificating about how Quakers are supposed to talk to one another respectfully, support one another, etc. Joanne Rhodes (the AVP practitioner from Memphis TN) said, "Quakers see that of god in everyone, and help each other, rather than insult each other." She said, "**Attacks** are not helpful in resolving differences." FYI: I have never attacked anyone; I only speak the truth from my experience, which often prompts me to name the patterns of racism I see, as a systemic racism analyst, anti-racism trainer and organizer.

Laura Seeger (Chattanooga TN) thanked Ministry and Nurture for their "work." Presumably, she was referring to the work they have been doing to build their beloved community of trust and unity within the all-white committee, instead of providing grounded spiritual leadership with regard to addressing SAYMA's racial conflicts—something they could easily do by participating in the yearly meeting's racial conflict transformation program, as they should, instead of avoiding it like the plague. Then, Laura said, "You cannot **force** them," a comment that clearly reveals her own **hostility** toward the program, because nobody has been forced to participate. The Racial Conflict Transformation Team has tried to encourage SAYMA Friends in leadership positions to participate in the yearly meeting endorsed racial Conflict Transformation program by eliminating all possible financial obstacles. So, there is no reason for any member of SAYMA Ministry and Nurture to resist signing up and showing up for the program, with an open mind and heart.

One Friend said, "Members of M&N refusing to participate in the racial conflict transformation program shows resistance to learning about white supremacy/racism, which is a powerful way to get to know one another better" if they really want to build a beloved community. A Young Adult Friend (YAF), mentioned that the YAFs and Friends of Color in FGC's Central Committee, have emphasized that the very existence of Quakerism may depend on Friends' ability to become an anti-racist institution. That absolutely needed to be shared, yet I think it fell on stubborn deaf ears, unfortunately.

What I observed was a few racist Friends overreacting to imaginary threats in order to derail the yearly meeting's progress toward racial justice. Thus this tiny minority of angry white Friends continued to repeat the same old slanderous narratives they have been circulating for years, based on nothing but insinuation, hearsay, and malicious gossip.

Since I was their target, and the one and only Friend of color attending this meeting, my strategy was just to observe these white folks, at various different

points on the continuum of becoming an anti-racist, politely argue with one another. I took notes, as I always do in these situations, so as not to misquote anyone, later. I learned the hard way, long ago, that in Quaker meetings for business, it is best to let white anti-racists handle their people. And, IF the white anti-racists do not or cannot bring themselves to call out the racism they see and put a stop to it, then they have no right to call themselves anti-racists. It's just that simple (Testimony of Simplicity).

Later that day, I was nominated to attend the FWCC World Gathering in South Africa, in 2024, as a SAYMA representative.

From the Nominating Committee report:

“Star Smith (Paul Cuffee Worship Group), as a delegate to FWCC, attending the 2024 gathering in South Africa. Star will bring her knowledge and experience among US Quakers to the issue of racial justice, which will be one of the strands running through the gathering next year.” (From the minutes)

That's when several hate-filled SAYMA racism deniers—who are just as bad as holocaust deniers, in my view--really went off the rails. As soon as my name was mentioned, they hijacked the proceedings, again, in order to advance their personal racist vendettas against me, the clerk of SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ), and the only person of color in attendance.

Laura Seeger (Chattanooga TN) said she was “standing in the way” of Star going as a delegate to the FWCC World Gathering in South Africa because she does not think I possess the “right characteristics” for an FWCC delegate: someone who is “open minded” and “patient”. I translate that to mean someone who is willing to be silent, biddable, and forgiving of unrepentant racists.

Someone said: The theme of the upcoming FWCC gathering is, “Ubuntu/community, healing historical injustice and care for creation” (From the FWCC website). They also said, “It is Star's open-minded patience with us that has helped SAYMA move toward racial justice” and, “I cannot think of a better person to send as a SAYMA delegate.”

Someone from the nominating committee explained that my name was brought forward by Geeta McGahey (Celo NC), who has been the SAYMA FWCC representative for many years”, to which Laura Seeger petulantly replied, “Star does not represent me!”

Another Friend said: “I am hearing that some Friends think being represented at FWCC is about representing white people.” And, back and forth it went, for much longer than it should have. There was a long discussion about the difference between attending the world gathering as a “representative”, vs. as a delegate, or

as an open participant. Because, some Friends were horrified that anyone would stand in the way of another Friend attending the FWCC world gathering, and they were trying to figure out a way for me to attend, in spite of Laura Seeger and Chuck Jones (Chattanooga TN) and Joanne Rhodes (Memphis) all standing in the way. Someone even said, "I do not remember anyone turning down someone's opportunity to attend FWCC, ever."

Finally, D'arcy Phinney (YAF from Alabama) said, "I encourage everyone to sit in the Spirit for a moment and tell me if any of this feels loving." Thank goodness for the YAFs that were present, that day!

Thankfully, someone said, "It is a common pattern of white behavior for white people to keep BIPOC from opportunities," and "Suppression of BIPOC is racist." This was exactly what needed to be said at that moment, and I was very glad I was not the one led to say it, because it was clear to me and everyone then, that I was the target of this racist attack and I should not have had to defend myself.

Yet they continued. Chuck Jones (Chattanooga TN) said, "I nominated Star for SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) but she's tearing this yearly meeting apart; two Meetings left because of her, and Friends of color will not come to the yearly meeting because of their attitude toward her and her attitude toward them." So now, it was evident that these racist Friends would stop at nothing; they even had the audacity to speak on behalf of Friends of color, who were not present to speak for themselves.

Oddly enough, Bob McGahey, who was extremely problematic when he was SAYMA clerk, countered by saying, "The allegations being made are unsubstantiated," and, "Star's prophetic gift has brought us great blessings." Thank you, Bob!

Wood Bolden (West Virginia) said Star and I disagree, but I support her right to be part of this community." Wood said his main concern is that as far as he knows, SAYMA never discussed or approved whether we want to be an anti-racist yearly meeting." He was also concerned about "Changes to URJ made by Star in 2019." (He was referring to URJ's strategic anti-racist decision, as a committee of Black and Indigenous Friends of color (BIFOC), to be a self-selecting committee that approves its own members, instead of having its membership nominated by an all-white nominating committee, that then must be approved by an all-white body of SAYMA Friends.)

It was fascinating for me to witness the proceedings at the SAYMA representative meeting, mirroring the very same concerning racist patterns of behavior that led URJ to make that decision--what with a hand-full of angry racist white Friends trying to block the clerk of URJ, who also happens to be a released Friend of color, called to a Quaker ministry of racial justice among Friends, from attending the FWCC world gathering, where they will be discussing racial and environmental justice. They presented a textbook demonstration of how NOT to

enable/empower Friends of color to manage our own affairs and ministries-- which is absolutely not the way to become an anti-racist faith community.

Joanne Rhodes, (AVP practitioner from Memphis TN) announced that she "talked to a Friend of color who said, "Star is running Friends of color out of SAYMA." Joanne insisted that she "saw" me "attack a Friend of color." After further disclosure, it turned out the Friend of color she imagined she saw me attack was Avis Wanda McClinton, from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

I felt I had to say something then, because I have never attacked Avis. Never. What many SAYMA Friends don't know or don't seem to remember, is that I was the one who first invited Avis Wanda to SAYMA. I used to be clerk of her spiritual support committee, in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, because no Philadelphia Friends of color dared to support her while she was the target of Quaker racism at Upper Dublin Friends Meeting (Abington Quarter/PhYM). The truth is, Avis has publicly attacked me, on more than one occasion, due to all the work a number of Friends from Philadelphia and SAYMA have done to divide us against each other.

The story that Star is attacking other Friends of color is a contrived narrative that continues to be circulated among SAYMA Friends. It is a common white supremacist settler colonial "divide and conquer" strategy, which I did not feel a need to defend myself against. So, I simply pointed out that in a court of law, this kind of testimony would be called "hearsay", and stricken from the record. Then, Daryl, one of our presiding SAYMA co-clerks said, "It is not a good idea to speak for others, especially white people speaking for people of color." Thank you, Daryl!

Another Friend commented, "Change always brings chaos. In the process, the person who brings change often gets blamed. What does it mean to be in right relationship with someone? How are we creating right relationship? I'm uncomfortable with Star NOT going as a delegate."

These racist Friends were clearly only interested in bashing the clerk of URJ, no matter what anyone said, because Laura Seeger (Chattanooga TN) then brought up disparaging remarks John Adams and Clive Gordon (two Black Friends from Atlanta) made several years ago, against URJ and its clerk. Even though their remarks were obviously not in good order--because they called me out publicly, at a SAYMA representative meeting, without bothering to discuss their complaints with me or the committee, first--these white Friends apparently continue using this incident to promote their racist agenda.

It is not clear what prompted John Adams and Clive Gordon (Atlanta GA) to act against the best interests of all Friends of color--even their own best interests--by asking that URJ be laid down and never funded. We can only speculate. But what we do know, is that some racist white Friends had been contacting them, crying and complaining about the clerk of URJ, just as they've been doing with Avis, saying I am abusing them or

bullying them, and asking them to DO something about me, the only Friend of color who dares to call them on their racist activities. Therefore, I invite these misguided white Friends to read chapter 11 of Dr. Robin DiAngelo's book, "[White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism](#)". Chapter 11 is all about the effects of white tears on already racially traumatized Black and Indigenous people of color.

D'arcy Phinney (YAF from Alabama) said, "If Friends of color have left SAYMA it is because their connections with white Friends are not strong enough. Chattanooga has not connected with Star Smith—conscious or unconscious. What is being done to rectify that? What will it take for Chattanooga not to stand in the way?"

I pointed out then, that the Friends who are so busy crying and complaining about me and URJ while claiming to represent others, have never once spoken to me about their issues. Not one of them has ever asked me to sit down with them to discuss my side of it.

Then, Chuck Jones (Chattanooga TN) said, "No one wants to reach out and ask because they know they will get blasted," and Laura Seeger (Chattanooga TN) said, "One needs boundaries. I don't engage with people who have said, 'Don't listen to Laura, she doesn't know what she is talking about.'" (I don't remember saying that to her. Yet the fact is, there is no white person anywhere, who could possibly know more than I do on the subject of racism/white supremacy, and/or colonialism. So, I must question her motives for being so angry about that?)

Joanne Rhodes, (AVP practitioner from Memphis TN) said, "Star is emotionally **abusive**." She also said she "discussed" me with others "whose opinions" she "respects, and they thought, IF she was given more power, maybe she wouldn't be so abusive, but that did not work." Then, she boldly accused SAYMA of enabling abusive behavior, and continued to insist that she "...saw Star attack Avis."

I was getting really tired of this histrionic performance by now, so I pointed out that I was there too, and repeated that I have never attacked Avis. Yet Joanne, the self-proclaimed AVP practitioner from Memphis, maintained that she was speaking HER truth. Basically, she was calling me a liar and an abuser, based on her imaginary white fears, which is racist, by definition. However, I agree with Joanne on one point: SAYMA is indeed enabling abuse, and I am the one being abused by SAYMA racists, while the yearly meeting's leadership doesn't seem to have any process in place that can put a stop to it.

Lydia (I do not remember her last name or know what Meeting she is from) said--directly to me instead of the body, so her comments were not in good order-- "Star, you gave me a public tongue lashing at the yearly meeting, and I felt abused. (This was an outrageously gross exaggeration. I did talk to her about a number of racist comments and assumptions she made in my presence, so it is

logical to conclude that Lydia just wanted to get her own licks in against the clerk of URJ and the only BIFOC present.)

Thank you, Pat Gailey (Berea KY), for saying, “Feeling uncomfortable is not the same as abuse—using that word is actually abusive.” Fortunately, Pat had the last word, as the meeting finally moved on to other business.

So much time was taken up with a few people’s obvious racist hysteria, that several committee reports were never presented or discussed, such as the finance committee and the treasurer’s reports.

It was determined during the meeting that I would be able to attend the FWCC gathering, NOT as a delegate or a representative, by using an open slot. However, the yearly meeting's FWCC committee decided to only spend their money for Friends to attend the gathering in person if they are approved as SAYMA representatives. Therefore SAYMA will have NO Friends of color attending the FWCC world gathering in South Africa unless someone raises the money for me to go.

Never forget that white supremacy is maintained by controlling the narratives, processes, and resources, and by good well-meaning folks who obey unjust laws, policies, procedures, and social conventions.

SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) is truly grateful to the anti-racist white Friends who showed up and spoke up. I can never thank the YAFs that were present at this meeting, enough. Much love and many, many thanks to the YAFs!

In the Light of racial justice,

Star Smith,
Clerk of SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ)