

SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) Report

June 2024

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.

Reality Check: We live in a rogue white supremacist colonial settler state, founded on genocide, theft, slavery and rape, maintained by ongoing and relentless racial violence. ALL people classified as white benefit from white supremacy/racism while ALL people classified as non-white experience racial oppression. Period. These irrefutable facts dictate the terms of our existence in this reality, personally and collectively.

The racial power dynamics in white supremacist frameworks, such as SAYMA and the Religious Society of Friends, always operate to advantage white people at the expense of non-white people. Therefore, it is imperative that white individuals and organizations that choose to do the work of becoming anti-racist, provide some type of structure to mitigate the inevitable traumatizing impacts of white people grappling with their racism on the very non-white people you say you wish to build an antiracist multicultural beloved community with.

Now, think of all the Quakers you know who believe racism has nothing to do with them, are tired of talking about white supremacy/racism, and become hostile whenever their racism, intentional or not, is called into question. Yes, change is hard for everyone, both those who benefit from systems of oppression and those who are oppressed by them. Even though the process of transitioning white people from white supremacist colonizers to decolonized antiracists may be uncomfortable and even painful for white people, sometimes, your transformation process will be much more challenging for the people of color in your sphere than it will ever be for you, due to longstanding racial power dynamics. This was the thinking behind SAYMA URJ's mission, to provide support and advocacy for Friends of color experiencing racism.

Looking back to the origins of SAYMA's racial conflict, we see that it was allowed to escalate and fester into the current seemingly intractable crisis, because there is no system or process in place to hold anyone accountable for the harms they cause. Yet, in spite of all that has happened since the formation of URJ, we are proud to report that we

are fulfilling our mission, regardless of a persistent pattern and practice of individual and systemic racial prejudice, “wounding”, and organized hostility to our work by a few weighty individuals in our yearly meeting, monthly meetings, and committees.

Growing Edges

Planning Committee took the first baby steps, after Jennifer Dickie became clerk, by instituting a practice of consulting with URJ before finalizing plans for SAYMA’s annual gathering. Planning Committee also waived registration, room and board fees for FOC, enabling us to attend the gathering FREE. Thus eliminating two major obstacles to welcoming more people of color to full participation and representation in yearly meeting activities. Now the only barriers for FOC to full participation are the cost of transportation to and from SAYMA activities, and Quaker racism.

Finance: Much of SAYMA’s longstanding racial conflict began with the Finance Committee. From 2017 to 2019 the leadership of that committee was just plain hostile to the notion of Friends of color having access and control of URJ’s own funds without white approval. In other words, they did not see us as adults, capable of managing our own money appropriately.

Charles Schade (Charleston WV) clerk of finance in 2019, committed multiple counts of racial wounding against members of URJ for spending URJ committee funds in absolute compliance with our mission. He basically criminalized us, falsely accused URJ of financial malfeasance, and conflicts of interest. When we sent an official complaint to the SAYMA clerk, Barbara Esther (Asheville), she told us, “apologies need to be mutual.” When URJ asked for a conflict transformation process we were ignored. But, Charles Schade, who had quit as finance committee clerk rather than take responsibility, demanded that the Finance committee hire a non-profit lawyer to investigate the matter. To make a long story short, the lawyer found no financial malfeasance and no conflicts of interest. Yet, even after the audit was done and no financial improprieties or conflicts of interest were found, members of URJ continued to be slandered all over the Quaker universe, a number of SAYMA Friends stood in the way of URJ funding, for FIVE years in a row, and the conflict transformation process URJ had asked for never materialized. Finally, at SAYMA’s annual retreat in 2023, the finance committee publicly apologized to the URJ members who had been criminalized and slandered, by Charles Schade, and his enablers and co-conspirators.

Ministry & Nurture: There is no kinder, gentler way to say that SAYMA Ministry & Nurture has been a major contributor to the long-standing racial contention afflicting SAYMA. Whereas M&N should have the capacity to mediate conflicts between Friends, they have been utterly incompetent to address incidents of racial conflict and/or wounding, so far. In fact, ever since the earliest ad hoc formation stages of URJ, members of SAYMA Ministry and Nurture have conspired with others to commit racist acts of aggression against SAYMA Friends of color, with impunity. It has been abundantly clear for some time, that new leadership is desperately needed on that committee IF SAYMA actually intends to become a welcoming antiracist, faith community. There is not enough time or space to outline the details, here, yet fortunately, our fervent prayers have been answered. There

will be a new clerk of Ministry and Nurture at the rise of SAYMA YM2024. Bless you, Lissa Place (Atlanta) for taking this on! URJ looks forward to working with you.

Nominating Committee: URJ chose to be a self-selecting committee because, "In the history of the world, nothing good has ever come out of oppressors making decisions impacting those they oppress." Considering the racial conflict, hostility and controversy URJ has had to endure while simply trying to nominate a representative for FOC to FWCC through the usual nominating process, we are convinced that we made the right decision for SAMA Friends of color, in 2019.

Due the racist backlash of a few white Friends, blocking approval of URJ's pre-approved nominee at the last two Representative Meetings, our chosen nominee cannot access the travel funds set aside for FWCC representatives. Luckily, way opened anyway, because a few private individuals were able to raise enough money to cover the registration and travel costs, and the intended racial harm was averted. However, that is far from the end of it, as the racial harm has yet to be appropriately addressed.

Therefore, URJ nominates Sharon "Star" Smith, for the third time, as SAYMA REPRESENTATIVE to FWCC, specifically to represent SAYMA Friends of color. Due to her record of service to SAYMA Friends of color as clerk of Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ), her expertise as an anti-racism analyst, as the primary organizer of the SAYMA racial conflict transformation program and process, as well as her level of insight and awareness regarding the themes of the FWCC World Gathering. SAYMA Friends of color agree that Star Smith is best equipped represent us.

Accomplishments:

With no existing racial conflict transformation process in place, things have quickly escalated to the breaking point. Racial contention completely polarized the yearly meeting. Friends have broken into factions over issues of race, and two monthly meetings have left SAYMA angrily. It was even suggested, two years ago, that yearly meeting functions be suspended for one or two years, "to give everyone a chance to heal". Except there was still no system in place to address or resolve our racial conflict. And that is why URJ in collaboration with the Racial Justice Working Group of anti-racist white Friends, proposed a program of our own.

We agreed that dismantling racism is a process, not a one-time event, which requires anti-racist Friends to BE and embrace change. We agreed that old structures and processes must be evaluated for their usefulness as new structures and processes are developed to replace them. We are collaboratively building the structures and processes to hold the change we seek.

Evolutionary/Revolutionary FOC led Racial Conflict Transformation Program and Process

On behalf of the SAYMA Racial Conflict Transformation Team, we are delighted to extend a heartfelt invitation for ALL FRIENDS, to participate in Cohort 3 of the SAYMA Racial

Conflict Transformation program, **“Understanding Racism/White Supremacy: What it IS, How it WORKS, and What Friends Can DO About it.”**

This program is a unique opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations and transformative experiences aimed at expanding our capacity to hold space for uncomfortable conversations about race and racism in Quaker circles, and what it takes to resolve racial conflicts between Friends.

Program Details:

- 3-Module Systemic Racial Analysis Training Series: thoughtfully curated and led by the SAYMA Racial Conflict Transformation team, along with monthly facilitated worship/study Affinity groups.

Module #1 What IS Racism/White Supremacy?

(Dates for Cohort 3 TBD) 10AM to 2PM Eastern Time

Defining terms and concepts, historical analysis, power dynamics, socialization/racialization, and Internalized Oppression

Module #2 How to Do Your Own Anti-Racism Audit

(Date TBD) 10 AM to 2 PM Eastern Time

We will use “Becoming An Anti-Racist Church: Journeying Toward Wholeness”, by Joseph Barndt--one of the founding members of the People’s Institute and Crossroads Ministry--as a guide.

Module #3 Where Quaker Social Change Theory Meets Anti-Racist Praxis

(Date TBT) 10 AM to 2 PM Eastern Time

What IS Quaker Social Change Theory? Continuing revelations, Spiritual Leadings, calls to Ministry, Spirit-led activism, speaking truth to power, grassroots organizing, offering sanctuary, technical and financial assistance (when asked), passive resistance, civil disobedience, coalition building, living your convictions, letting your life speak, standing alone with integrity (when necessary) but preferably, with the endorsement and support of one’s spiritual community.

What is anti-racist praxis?

In this segment, we look at how change happens, processes, and strategies, as developed by critical race theorists, anti-racism organizers, and trainers, from The People’s Institute, Crossroads Ministry, Roots of Justice, Center for the Study of White American Culture (CSWAC); historical Quaker slavery Abolitionists, such as Benjamin Lay, Anthony Benezet, John Woolman, and contemporary Quaker social change organizers and activists such as, Parker Palmer, George Lakey, Bayard Rustin and Frances Crowe.

Structure & Process: The 3-module systemic racism training series curated and led by the SAYMA Racial Conflict Transformation Team: Star Smith (clerk of SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ), Shannon Roberts Smith (Clerk of SAYMA Racial Justice Working Group), and Ukumbwa Sauti (Consultant) The training modules will include, lecture, assigned readings, video and other media, journaling, queries, and your facilitated worship/study focus groups.

- Small facilitated affinity/focus Group Meetings: Participants will be part of a small (8 to 10 Friends) facilitated anti-racism worship/study group that meets for two hours monthly, for a period of one year, starting in October. These gatherings serve as brave spaces to build deep connections with fellow Friends engaged in anti-racism work, network, explore ideas, share perspectives, and support one another.
- A dedicated Friends of Color worship/study group facilitated by consultant Ukumbwa Sauti. (At no cost to Friends of color who register)

The systemic racial analysis training sessions provide invaluable insights and practical tools for identifying, analyzing and addressing racial conflict in Quaker spaces, toward understanding and dismantling systemic racism as part of the process for developing an anti-racist faith community, competent to welcome diverse peoples of color and families.

Cost: \$300. total, for all three Understanding Racism Training Modules and participation in a monthly worship/study focus group—that's much less than you would pay any comparable systemic racial analysis training organization such as the People's Institute, Cross Roads, Center for the Study of White American Culture (CSWAC), or Roots of Justice. Plus, though SAYMA's Racial Conflict Transformation Program covers the same systemic racial analysis training as other programs, ours was designed by Quakers for Quakers.

(Because this program is endorsed by SAYMA, Friends and should have no problems accessing spiritual enrichment funds from your Meetings, if necessary. And, there is NO COST whatsoever for Friends of Color.)

We have already observed dynamic outcomes from this program, developed by Quakers for Quakers. Though we are still laboring through SAYMA's racial conflict, we are witnessing a loving and growing power of embodied anti-racist praxis expressed in our Meetings. Many participants from Cohort 1 and 2 have committed to continuing their worship/study group work as we transition into Cohort 3—at no additional cost.

What URJ needs: Your commitment to ongoing funding support for racial conflict transformation work, programming, and evolving processes. Why? Because Friends have 532 years worth of white supremacist settler colonial violence to address, skilled facilitation is expensive, and, “Consciousness + Commitment = Change.”

There are multiple ways to support this work posted on the SAYMA website at www.sayma.org, under Racial Justice.

Queries: (FWCC World Plenary 2024 Study Guide)

How do you demonstrate Friends' testimony that all people are equal?

How do we “live in that Life and Power that takes away the occasion of all wars?”

What is your experience of harms caused by past and/or present injustice? What is your story in relation to this?

SOURCES: Past URJ Reports, the Epistle from SAYMA Friends of Color, and URJ's Resource List, are posted on the SAYMA website at www.sayma.org, under Racial Justice. FWCC World Plenary 2024 Study Guide.

<https://friendsgc.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Racial-Wounding-and-Racial-Justice-In-Quaker-Communities-Guide.pdf>

Approved by SAYMA URJ, 6.19.24