

Letter from the Editor

Tom Darrow

Kenosha-Racine Worship Group

Here we are almost through 2020, and in many ways, it seems that life has made little progress. I have acquired the life of a hermit, venturing out only for absolute necessities. I even find myself not wanting to have any social contact for fear of contracting the “deadly virus.” As if that were not enough, the tragic event in Minneapolis in May and the national outcry about the ever-present racism in our lives have literally brought the nation to its knees. The corresponding political implications of racism have given us yet another issue to add to our list of challenges and priorities. This year the virtual NYM Annual Session squarely addressed the issue of racism that we all find within ourselves. It is that one positive step and its subsequent discussions that provide the light of encouragement in what otherwise would be a dark future. Once again, the words and actions of Friends gathered in this issue of NYM Journal create the spark that can light our way through this void. I offer a special thanks to John Greenler of Madison Monthly Meeting for his contribution of photos from around the city of Madison showing street-art related to the Black Lives Matter support rallies there.



Photo: John Greenler

Contents:

Letter from the Editor	1
So You Want to be a White Ally?	2
Loving in Times of Hate, Transforming Violence	3
The Path to Undoing Systemic Racism is by Aligning Our Interests	5
Epistle of 2020 Annual Pre-Gathering Retreat	7
Minute for Black Lives	8
Poetry	
An Arrest in Appleton	10
White Work	11
This is Personal	11
Living Gratitude	13
Thoughts of a Quaker Treasurer	14

There is a current literary conversation about capitalizing the racial terms Black and White. While there are many and opposing positions put forward by The Atlantic, The New York Times, The Associated Press and the Columbia Journalism Review among others, the Northern Yearly Journal will continue to follow the writing style of the American Psychological Association (APA). “Racial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized. Therefore, use ‘Black’ and ‘White’ instead of ‘black’ and ‘white’. . . Likewise, capitalize terms such as ‘Native American,’ ‘Hispanic,’ and so on.” This standard will apply to original material submitted to the NYM Journal; documents from entities outside of the Northern Yearly Meeting will appear as issued.

So You Want to be a White Ally?

Gerri Williams

Duluth-Superior Friends Monthly Meeting

In the wake of George Floyd's murder in May, I have witnessed something I never thought possible in America: widespread public uprisings for racial justice, with hundreds of thousands of White

Americans participating. Changes in public opinion and attitudes among the White majority have been equally unexpected, massive and sustained. It's as if White Americans ingested a truth serum that allowed you to see a little of what reality is for many African Americans. It has certainly affected your reading habits: sales of books on the topic of race such as *How to Be an Antiracist* (Kendi, I. X., 2019) and *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Race* (DiAngelo, R., 2018) have risen to the top of the bestseller lists.

Now many White people are asking, "What can I do?" —a heartening development indicating your commitment to challenge police brutality, income inequality and other elements of structural racism. But, there is another element of *wokeness* that seems to exist under the radar, a practice that inflicts incalculable harm on people of color, that you CAN do something about: voter suppression. Perhaps White Americans are uninformed or unconcerned about voter suppression because most

of you will never be affected by it. Seriously, have you ever experienced any inconvenience at the polls beyond, say, a wait in line or a temporary machine malfunction? American elected officials knowingly and maliciously depriving you of your franchise is just not in your frame of reference.

But, it is in mine. I wept when I learned about the brazen, updated Jim Crow tactics leading up to and during the 2016 election to bar Blacks from the polls, including restricting voter registration drives, purging voter rolls, instituting onerous ID requirements, and reducing or eliminating early voting days and hours. Wielded by officials in Republican-led or -dominated states, the motive and effect is to marginalize voters of color. The persistence of these tactics, and their success, confirmed what I already feared: that my rights as a citizen in my own country—a country where my family has lived and helped to build for six generations—still, today and at any time could be erased by White politicians, and tolerated by their White supporters and fellow party members.

Voter suppression, then, translates into a kind of civic murder. It nullifies our standing and agency as citizens—reducing the odds that we people of color can ever change the conditions that oppress us through our participation in the electoral system. It is the very essence of "structural racism." And, to add insult to injury, there is no redress after the fact, even if lawsuits are successful in challenging these voter suppression practices. Proof of malfeasance does not alter election results.

That is where you, White ally, come in. Maybe you are in an anti-racism reading group; you wear a "Black Lives Matter" T-shirt and plant a sign with that motto on your front lawn. All worthy things that should be continued. Nevertheless, while unlearning racism is a lifetime process, the election is in fewer than 50 days. The Republican National Committee is rolling out even more ruthless plans to disadvantage voters. It plans to deploy an intimidating force of 50,000 poll watchers with the power to challenge citizens casting their votes in 15 key states, while also ramping up lawsuits to limit vote-by-mail access. [Associated Press, (2020, August 11). Freed from legal constraints, GOP ramps up effort to monitor voting. *Los Angeles*

About the NYM Journal

The NYM Journal aims to inform and inspire Friends with examples of Quaker faith and practice.

Editor: Tom Darrow

Kenosha-Racine Worship Group

Layout Artist: Colby Abazs

Duluth-Superior Friends Meeting

The NYM Journal is available to the public and posted on the NYM website:

www.northernyearlymeeting.org

Friends of Northern Yearly Meeting are encouraged to submit creative artistic work and writing, including personal reflections and articles about your work and experiences as Quakers, to nymjournal@gmail.com Deadline for submissions November 6, 2020

No copyright infringement intended in this publication. The views, thoughts and opinions expressed in the NYM Journal belong solely to each author, and do not necessarily reflect the views, thoughts or opinions of Northern Yearly Meeting, its member meetings or worship groups or its officers.

Times. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com>.] The answer to “What can I do?” lies directly in your willingness to expose voter suppression. This is an urgent moment requiring action and engagement.

What can that engagement look like? It means, starting today, working to support progressive candidates through myriad means, including phone- and text-banking, sending postcards and letters to potential voters, and spreading the word that the U.S. Postal Service needs federal funds to facilitate safe voting during the pandemic through mail-in ballots. Doing this helps circumvent the underhanded closing of polling places in minority communities. Still another means is working with groups to register new voters or to re-register those unfairly purged from the rolls.

I know, I know. We are in the midst of a pandemic that has upended everyone's lives financially, medically and socially. People are facing the possibility of unemployment, displacement from their homes, and are suffering the mental stress of illness, even death, from a novel virus.

Whites are still the numerical majority in the United States and your participation has an outsized effect on the electoral outcome. Republicans haven't found a way to suppress White progressive voters—yet. And the tragic fact that Black, Brown and Native people in America suffer the highest rates of infections *and deaths* in this pandemic means you, White ally, need to “stand in the breach” for people of color who are absent from the electorate due to suppression as well as the ravages of Covid-19.

The good news: there is an array of groups organizing for the election—some venerable and established, others grassroots startups brimming with young energy—that match your interests and offer a range of options for participation. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund; Movement Voter Project (which funds Black-led grassroots citizens groups); Americans of Conscience; and Native American Rights Fund (vote.narf.org) are just a few of the action-oriented organizations that need your support.

Digital outreach enables you to participate in your own or any other state's campaign to highlight candidates who denounce and combat voter

suppression. On your own, you can write to officials in states that flagrantly suppress minority voting access, and let them know you refuse to spend your vacation dollars, or plan your future family reunions or professional association meetings in states that disenfranchise your fellow Americans. Money talks, so be sure to send copies of your correspondence on your stance to the local Chamber of Commerce and Department of Tourism as well.

So there you have it. I believe your desire to confront racism is sincere—but fervor and commitment can wane over time. *Now* is the moment to translate any anguished hand wringing about “What can I do?” into actions that will benefit not only your fellow citizens of color, but will move a fairer and more transparent electoral system forward for everyone. Do you want to be a White ally in a way that is tangible, timely and supportive of democracy? There are fewer than 50 days to the election, and there is work to be done. If not now, when? If not you, who?

Or you could just pick up another book on White fragility.

Loving in Times of Hate, Transforming Violence

Salomón Medina

*Soyapango Monthly Meeting and Annual Friends
Meeting of El Salvador*

*Translated by Allie Prescott, Friends Peace Team
Communications Specialist*

*Edited by Mónica Maher, Peacemaking en las
Américas Coordinator*

*Submitted by John Skinner, NYM representative to
Friends Peace Teams and
Clerk of the Yearly Meeting Representatives
Committee*

“The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) Workshops have greatly affected more than my feelings; they have produced substantial changes in my life. When I took the first workshop, I was on the point of suicide ... the maximum expression of violence toward oneself! ... The AVP Workshops have definitely created a before and after; not

everything is resolved, but they have given me the tools necessary to see others and myself from a different perspective. AVP programmed me to think, to love and to respect my life and the lives of others. I am happy and satisfied to be part of this extraordinarily transformative experience. ... Now, when faced with the vicissitudes of life, violence and hate are not my first options. I feel like a revolutionary ‘because to love in times of hate is a revolutionary act,’” said Alfredo Ágape, a fifty-year-old participant from Zacamil, a violent and dangerous neighborhood in the capital, San Salvador.

AVP began in El Salvador over 17 years ago, and continues to be supported by Peacebuilding en las Américas – Friends Peace Teams. Alfredo’s story is one example of many who have taken the workshop series and become part of the AVP community in El Salvador. Workshops draw on the shared experience of participants, using interactive exercises, discussions, games and role-plays to examine the ways we respond to situations where injustice, prejudice, frustration and anger can lead to aggressive behavior and violence. Together, participants build skills in listening, affirmation, problem-solving and creative conflict resolution.

As an AVP El Salvador Facilitating Team, we have the opportunity to facilitate workshops with vulnerable and excluded groups. We accompany churches and organizations that work with: sex workers, victim-survivors of the civil war, and community members in neighborhoods considered at high risk. In many communities, participants include women, children, adolescents, and youth affected by domestic violence as well as other types of social and political violence. We have the opportunity to strengthen their lives despite an environment full of hostility.

We are extremely concerned about social violence and dominant political confrontations marked by unnecessary hate and force. The situation challenges us to contribute to the prevention of violence and create a culture of peace. We need to contribute peace, justice, nonviolence and hope, those values and principles we have acquired in Transforming Power.



Photo by Salomón Medina, Used with permission

We have facilitated workshops with some groups both inside and outside of San Salvador, in rural, semi-rural and urban areas besieged by gangs, organized crime and drug trafficking. In each area, there are latent needs in terms of strengthening self-esteem, seeking and learning a nonviolent way of life and regaining hope. We have seen this in people who have shown a strong interest in participating in the AVP workshops. The workshops can have a positive impact not only on an individual level, but also on the family and community levels.

We have been in close contact with the Committee of Mothers and Families of Persons Disappeared (CoMadres) during the armed conflict. CoMadres is an organization made up of people who survived the civil war. Twenty-eight years after the signing of the peace accord that officially ended the 12-year war, CoMadres members are still fighting for their human rights and waiting for reparations. Many members have experienced horrific violence and have severe traumas that continue to affect them today.

One CoMadres participant from a workshop in San Rafael Cedros, a municipality in Cuscatlán near the capital, said, “I liked the group activities, the techniques and the dynamics which I will be able to apply with groups I work with daily and also with my family. The methodology is very good because it allows citizen participation and collective reflection. I celebrate the opportunity to participate in these spaces because I feel comfortable coexisting together with others. We can learn by

getting out of the routine, be with other people, and have new experiences.”

Another area where we work is Zacamil. For the most part, Zacamil is considered one of the largest urban slums in the capital with a large presence of gangs, organized crime and drug trafficking. This is in addition to domestic violence, which is covered up, and to the structural violence, that makes residents very vulnerable.

In these contexts, we have conducted AVP workshops with children, adolescents, youth, women, the elderly, and some people living with disabilities. We have also been given the opportunity to accompany a ministry that works and cares for people who are sex workers in San Salvador, which has given us a different perspective on reality. We have realized that among people’s basic needs are overcoming fear and trauma and strengthening their self-esteem.

With the AVP and Trauma Recovery workshops, we have accompanied and brought hope to many people and communities. They have realized that they are valuable people. One participant from a workshop with people working as sex workers in San Salvador said, “I learned how important it is to value and respect myself. I learned to see the best in others. I liked how participative it was, that we had time to play, learn, and participate. ... Thanks to the workshop, I confirmed that the decisions I have made were successful in avoiding violence and in ending relationships that caused me harm; here I confirmed that I had not respected myself. This will help me speak up and describe when someone harms me, without me causing violence.”

(Editor’s Note: Typically, each workshop in the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) lasts 18–20 hours over a two or three-day period. The workshop places a strong emphasis on the experiences of the participants, building confidence that everyone contributes something of value to violence prevention.

CoMadres is the committee of mothers and relatives of prisoners, the disappeared and the politically assassinated of El Salvador. It was established in 1977, with the help of the Catholic Archdiocese of San Salvador and Saint Óscar Romero, to discover the truth behind the missing relatives of the membership.)



Photo by Salomón Medina, Used with permission

The Path to Undoing Systemic Racism is by Aligning Our Interests

*Ralph Jacobson
Prospect Hill Monthly Meeting*

“Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach.”

Clarissa Pinkola Estes
Estes, C. P. (Author). (2008, January 28). You Were Made For This [Audio podcast]. <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=548>

It took meeting with a union organizer and our eight Black crewmembers to open my eyes as to how my crew’s narratives about the world differ from mine. As an electrical contractor, signatory to the IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) contract, I had recruited and hired these men from the Black community to install solar arrays for my company. I was planning to organize each of them into the electrical apprenticeship program, which would get them started on careers as electricians. Solar installation has been deemed electrical work by the Minnesota Board of Electricity, so being an electrician gives access to a lot of work in this field.

However, one after another, each one said, “I don’t want to spend five years of my life being ordered around by middle-aged White electricians. No thanks!” As that sunk in, I realized that to them, this pathway looked like indentured servitude, which generations of Black people have experienced too much. “Been fooled before, not this time!” This was

my rude awakening to the narrative that they carry, and some darned good direct feedback!

My story about trade unions begins with my grandfather, who was the first business agent of the Ironworkers Local #512 when it was organized under the AFL-CIO in the 1930s. Following him, my dad and my uncles all made careers in ironwork. They had good jobs, solidly blue-collar middle class. Then what was up with my crew? Didn't a union electrical career look good to them? A friend from the Northside clued me in; until the 1930s, contractors up north would sometimes hire skilled Black workers from down south for lower wages. The narrative my crew brought into the story is that the trade unions were organized to keep Black workers out.



Photo by Jonas Ferlin, Used with permission

These men in my crew took pride in their work; they loved that they were making a difference in the world. A lot of the work of installing solar panels is actually skilled labor work and not electrical, but it is all covered under the union contract. So, because of my assumption, I was now in trouble with the union because I had hired non-union workers who were not interested in the path to membership that was offered. I began to wonder if there are any alternatives – what about a laborer's union track? Again, one after another, each crew member said, "I could do that." A White guy might not catch the difference, but it would feel like a parallel role, not a subservient one, to the electrical work.

There has been talk for a while among union shops, about creating a "construction electrician" track for just this purpose. This has met with resistance from the rank and file electricians because they don't want to give up work that they and their forerunners fought for. I don't find that to be unreasonable – most electricians have seen times when work was scarce. It is not my intention to start blaming the union or anybody else, but here is a situation that clearly illustrates the difficulty of rooting out systemic racial bias, once we go from setting a broad intention, to actually digging down and finding that root to pull out. We find that there is no one person or rule to go after, but a whole lot of reasonable people just doing their jobs. However, we are up against attitudes on all sides, and each one has some history with which to reckon.

Systemic racism is so pervasive in our society that most of us find it impossible to find a way to get started on that kind of work. We each have a lot of work to do in the circles in which we operate, where we can have an impact. Thinking about where attitudes come from may give us a pathway to solutions, like the little piece of yarn sticking out of the sweater, that you pull on and the knitted structure starts to unravel. An attitude that makes me not want to share comes from a place of fear and anxiety, even if my family has been blessed with enough for generations. The fear may be vestigial, but it runs deep, and it can influence our behavior towards other people. Helping someone soften that kind of an attitude usually can't be done in one swift move, it takes time. I was reminded by a friend who works in a factory that when people who are different from each other, work side-by-side, they get to know each other. Their attitudes soften as they become real people in each other's eyes.

A potential way out of my impasse came up recently, when I received a call from an officer at a large electrical company, which is a union shop. He wanted to get some insight about why the union shops are not getting much market share in the burgeoning solar industry. We had a chance to discuss some economic realities, that perhaps having higher-paid electricians doing all of the labor work on a solar installation is pricing them out of the market. We agreed that if he could support the creation of a construction electrician track, his

pricing could be more competitive, and his electricians would see more work in the solar field.

This change could show up to the electricians as an opportunity for new work, and not as a need to give up some work. It could make it easier for some union members to soften their attitudes, because their interest in solar work would align with the creation of a track under the union contract that would be more acceptable to a group of people with whom my crew identify. I find it encouraging to think that the interests of these two groups could be aligned, and I view this as an example of where the real work needs to be done in order to move from well-stated intentions to actually taking down oppressive barriers to full participation of Black people in the economy.

We're not finished with this yet, but there is already a lesson in it for me. If we can find a way to align the interests for all of those involved, so that change shows up as opportunity, more people may be willing to look beyond their deeply emotional attitudes, and work together to undo structures that exclude or reduce opportunity for people based on the [artificial] notion of "race." We can find ways to align our interests as members of the "human race."

[Ralph Jacobson (ralphi@ips-solar.com) is the Founder of IPS Solar, a 30-year solar installation company and currently Chief Officer for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion of IPS Development, in Roseville, Minnesota, and was the founding Board Chair of the Minnesota Solar Energy Industries Association.]

Epistle of 2020 Annual Pre-Gathering Retreat

*The Outgoing Epistle of the 2020 Virtual
Pre-Gathering of Friends of Color and their
Families
Friends General Conference*

"We are a harvest of survivors. But then, that's what we've always been."

-Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

To Friends Everywhere:

We begin by remembering our ancestors who were strong enough to make a way for us. Friends of Color and their families met for Pre-Gathering Retreat on 26 Day through 28 Day Sixth Month 2020. This is the eighth year Friends of Color have

met for our Pre-Gathering Retreat. First-timers felt welcomed and validated. This year, we met virtually with our largest attendance yet. There were 47 attendees, ranging in age from 11 months through 77 years from Canada, Mexico, Switzerland and the United States of America.

The importance of this Gathering for Friends of Color worshipping in community together cannot be overstated. To our Friends in the wider Quaker world, we the Friends of Color can't breathe. During this weekend, we enjoyed the rare opportunity of not being othered in Quaker space. We experienced the joy of being seen as we are and the affirmation of a supportive spirit among ourselves in the "Amen corner". The term "Amen corner" comes from the Black church and is a communal space that validates, affirms and uplifts the spirit. In isolation, due to COVID19, we are being kept apart and away from those we love, trust and need. The pre-gathering retreat brought back the source of community and family that has been missing. We were able to exhale, relax, and breathe together. Many of us did not realize how exhausted we were until we were able to relax with one another. The gifts of the spirit were abundant. We shared in worship, gentle yoga and meditation, meaningful discussions, journaling and self-discovery. We also listened and shared in each other's joys, triumphs, pains and sorrows. We experienced spiritual renewal that was awakened by moving through pain to hope for the future for ourselves and our children. Attention and space was given for people to play games, dance, talk, grieve, play music, watch videos, and write.

We have much gratitude to the Program Coordinator for the Ministry on Racism; the pioneer who laid the groundwork to make the Pre-Gathering Retreat available to us within FGC gathering and who faithfully makes it happen each year. We are grateful for being able to acknowledge all that makes us human, for finding home and connection. Our inner Light is magnified and our capacity to breathe deeply is nurtured when that of God is acknowledged in each of us. It is our hope that other Friends of Color will know that such a space exists and know that they are desired, needed and will be warmly embraced.

The Pre-Gathering Friends of Color Retreat provides a reprieve. Friends of Color need respite



Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends

Minute for Black Lives

Approved June 13, 2020

Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends approves this Minute for Black Lives, noting that some of us are challenged by the language it uses. Still, we lean into it, knowing that we have empowered the Equity and Inclusion Committee to be a prophetic voice. Acting as Christ's Body to engage in the work of justice will often be uncomfortable for those of us with privilege.

Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends witnesses the current people's uprising for police accountability and for racial justice and we take a stand for Black lives. We urge all Quakers, in our Yearly Meeting and beyond, to do the same in word and action. Neutrality is not an option if we are to fully embrace our underlying Truth as Friends: to recognize God in all people.

George Floyd is only the most recent police murder to be made public. Just the day after Floyd's killing, Black trans man Tony McDade was shot and killed by police in Tallahassee, Florida. We honor the memories of these two men, as well as Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and all those killed by police, other state violence, and organized white violence throughout the centuries back to the slave trade that is a backbone of the founding of this nation. We grieve and we feel prophetic rage.

We, as individuals and as a Yearly Meeting, especially as a body of mostly white people, are implicated in the system of white supremacy. We have the opportunity to step into this moment with our hearts wide and with humility, calling on God's support and guidance, to listen to Black leadership. We must be willing to make mistakes, to commit to the movement for the long haul, and to be part of the transformation of our communities: "on earth as it is in heaven." There is a place for all of us, whether in the streets or behind the scenes, making donations or making phone calls. We join our voices with our Quaker ancestors of all races who

from the systemic racism too often found in our American Quaker community that often goes unseen by many white Friends. Friends of Color need respite from the insidious lie of white supremacy manifested in daily oppressive traumatic stressors (microaggressions) which have the effect of blaming the oppressed for our own oppression. Friends of Color need respite and support which our home meetings have not provided. Friends of Color are fatigued from being asked to teach white folks.

We ask all Quakers to heed a Call to Action. Please sit with these queries:

- 1) What is the Spirit leading me to do about the historic and ongoing racial pandemic across my meeting, my community, my work environment and my country?
- 2) How can we honor the memory of people who have lost their lives to the struggle for a better world?
- 3) How can we construct ways for people to engage and remain engaged *beyond* good intentions in the struggle for true equality in health, education, wealth and against state sanctioned violence?
- 4) How can we encourage the support of Friends of Color in Quaker worship and meetings around the world?
- 5) How can Friends de-center themselves in order to listen to and hear Friends of Color?
- 6) How can I support respite for Friends of Color?

In this time of COVID19, People of Color discovered that a deadly pandemic is secondary to the long-time pandemic of racism in our lives. People of Color are more likely to die from COVID19 due to the effects of racism and oppression. Think about how this pandemic has turned your world upside down, economically, emotionally, psychologically. Now imagine there is no one working on a vaccine, and that if you get sick or die, no one notices or cares. For People of Color, the human-made pandemic of racism is deadlier than COVID19, and we need you to do work so that we can BREATHE.

In Peace, Love and

2020 FGC Virtual Pre-Gathering Retreat for Friends of Color and their Families

have worked for the abolition of slavery and for Black civil rights throughout the generations — and who have also made mistakes.

We as Quakers and as Christians are members of a great spiritual body pulling toward justice, back to Jesus whose brown body was lynched by the law keepers of his time and of whose resurrection we proclaim. We must all find our place in this moment, in this movement, and for a lifetime of work for racial justice. This is the way of Jesus: that first shall be last and that justice shall roll down like waters.

- We acknowledge and apologize for the ways in which we, as Quakers, have historically and are currently benefiting from, centering and perpetuating white privilege and colonialism. We recognize that we have remained silent and passive when our voice and action were needed.
- We, as a Yearly Meeting, commit to being actively anti-racist: working to undo individual and systemic racism.
- We call for the immediate end to police violence.
- We demand the dismantling of current policing and criminal justice systems that enable and perpetuate racism (American Friends Service Committee resource: 6 reasons why it's time to defund the police).
- We commit to following leaders from currently and historically marginalized communities who have called on us to learn and join in solidarity in the demand for equity and justice in ways that are in line with the example of Jesus.
- We recognize that our peace testimony cannot mean passivity, that we will stand up in advocacy and not remain silent on issues of injustice. We recognize the unequal burden Black, Indigenous, and people of color have suffered historically and presently in this racist society.
- We commit to providing reparative funds to begin to compensate for this inequity.
- We commit to promoting, supporting and participating in individual, local, and yearly meeting wide continuing education about Black

history, colonialism, white privilege, and police violence.

- We recognize that words without action accomplish little. We commit to taking tangible action. We proclaim with American Friends Service Committee that we won't stop until we dismantle the whole racist system.

Queries

- “Why have I chosen not to see the racism that is happening in front of me every single day? Why have I chosen to remain destructively silent and immobile as I watch Black people lynched in our streets?” (Melia LeCour). “How did I become so well-adjusted to injustice?” (Cornel West quoted in Melia LaCour, *A Call to White People: It's Time to Live Into the Answer*, 6/2/2020).
- “How will I work on my anti-Blackness? How is my heart closed to the public and private suffering of Black, Indigenous and people of color?...[What is] preventing me from living into a life of anti-racism and love for the humanity of Black, Indigenous, and people of color[?]” (Melia LaCour, *A Call to White People: It's Time to Live Into the Answer*, 6/2/2020).
- What would immediate action look like for each individual and for our Yearly Meeting, as we profess our conviction to stand in solidarity and demand justice for Black, Indigenous, and people of color?
- What are we doing to educate ourselves about historic and current manifestations of systemic oppression in our nation and in our local communities?
- How has the Quaker testimony of peace masked passivity? How can we be accountable, show up and support Black, Indigenous, and people of color in ways they have asked us to?
- “You may say John Woolman sayeth this, and nineteenth century Quakers sayeth that, but what canst thou say? — What will we say? What will our actions say? What will our budgets say?” (Mackenzie Morgan, message to West Hills Friends Church, 6/7/2020).

POETRY



Photo by Suzy Hazelwood, Used with permission

An Arrest in Appleton

*Kat Griffith
Winnebago Worship Group*

I cannot unsee what I saw.

A young man in dreadlocks, driving an old red car,
Is pulled over by a cop.
He pulls into the parking lot next to our car
And puts both hands out the window.
The officer is still in his car, and has not yet said
anything to the young man
or even approached his car.
But the youth knows to put his hands up and hold
them out,
Visibly, ostentatiously, empty and idle.
The hands wait
And I wait
While the officer radios someone.
Waiting and watching.
A witness should one be needed.

The officer, young, earnest, hesitant, polite,
Explains to the youth why he pulled him over.
Asks for a license.
Returns to the squad car.
I stand, leaning against my car, still waiting.
Wishing I could say something to the young man –
let him know why I am there.
Not as a voyeur, not as a rubbernecking gawker, not
as someone eager to see the humiliation of another.
As a witness should one be needed.
The officer approaches me and says he needs to
take the young man into custody

and could we please move away
since he doesn't know how the youth will react to
his arrest.

He seems apologetic, uncomfortable –
no doubt he sees my “celebrate diversity” t-shirt
and suspects why I am still there.

I want to tell him I am a witness for him too – that
if his life were endangered I would care.
But surely he knows that I am watching first
because I do not trust.

He waits for the arrival of another officer, a Black
man.
Together they cuff and pat down the young man,
who stands wordlessly.

There is no violence, no cruelty, no ugly words.
But I cannot meet the young man's eyes as he is led
to the squad car.
I stayed to witness possible abuse, not his
humiliation.
I want to tell him why I stayed, but my helplessness
and ignorance make even the urge feel like a
conceit.
What really did I have to offer him?
Of what use is my silent distress?

I can't meet the officer's gaze either.
I feel guilty for my mistrust given that he has been
civil, even gentle,
helping the young man carefully into the squad car
and buckling his seatbelt.
Perhaps he, too, feels humiliated – a White man
with a badge and a gun
watched in the act of arresting an unarmed and quiet
young Black man –
after all the stories.
No chance to explain.

It's possible my presence prevented violence or
abuse.
It seems more likely my presence was oppressive to
both parties.
Why could I not say what I wanted to say?
Why could I not say, “Whatever you might have
done, young man, know that I care for your life and
your dignity and I am here for you.”

Why could I not say, “You are not only a blue uniform with a badge to me, you are a human being, and if you do your job with honesty and respect you have mine.
I am here for you, too.”

How did I, with the intention of being an upstander, Become a silent and useless witness to this sad scene?
How did I, too, seem to play out a script that society ordained?
How did I become the distressed but passive White woman?

I cannot unsee what I saw.
I cannot now speak what I left unspoken.
I can and must unstick what was stuck
And release the love that was captive to fear in my soul.
May this failed dress rehearsal be preparation
For the next time.

White Work

*Ralph Jacobson
Prospect Hill Friends Monthly Meeting*

Get to know a Black person or family
And learn to love them as your own.
What are their aspirations in life?
See the ridiculousness they have to deal with,
Structured into systems mostly
Enforced by well-meaning people
Oblivious to the contradictions.
Allow yourself to feel the outrage and despair
That these friends struggle with daily.
Use your whiteness, your networks, and your privilege
To find ways to correct these injustices
For these people that you know and love.
And then realize that although you feel good
That you have helped somebody that you care about,
You have not changed the system one little bit,
But only reinforced it by exercising your white power!
Don't do their work for them, do your own work!
So here is where the work gets really good:

Use your whiteness, your networks, and your privilege
To undo the structure you're standing on.
Hard to do that while you're standing on it, isn't it?
We have to work together, Black and White
To balance our way off of this pedestal
Of White privilege which we are stuck on.
When you get down, please come by and tell me:
Do you feel less of a monster now?



Photo by Pelipoer Lara, Used with permission

This is Personal

*Shel Gross
Madison Friends Monthly Meeting*

“It's one of the reasons we have five cops standing on a black woman's neck in Birmingham. Because at some point they believed, they were taught and they believed that they were better than other people because they were white. It leads to a moral bankruptcy.” A Conversation with James Baldwin: 6/24/63; American Archive of Public Broadcasting (WGBH and the Library of Congress), Boston, MA and Washington, DC.

Of course, I knew who James Baldwin was. He was one of those radical Negro writers of the sixties. *The Fire Next Time*. *Revolution*.

Clearly, I had heard the name but I didn't have a clue about what he had to say until earlier this year when I read a book about his debate with William Buckley at Cambridge: *The Fire Is Upon Us* (Buccola, 2019). But not really a debate, more of a demonstration of two very different ways of looking at the same “problem,” the Negro problem. Except

– and this is the point – back in the sixties, when everyone was viewing it as the Negro problem, Baldwin understood it as the “White” problem. Maybe we have finally caught up to him.

The White problem – as in why do White people continue to treat Blacks as inferior and subhuman? Why do Whites continue to brutalize Blacks, especially through our police forces?

“I am terrified at the moral apathy, the death of the heart, which is happening in my country. These people deluded themselves for so long that they really don’t think I’m human. I base this on their conduct, not on what they say. This means that they have become moral monsters.” AAPB, ibid

Buckley was focused on the political response – how do we get Negroes to have more rights. He didn’t view them as subhuman, but their condition had made them unable – just yet – to really be able to handle full citizenship. How do we do this respecting states’ rights, an issue he made the cornerstone of what became the modern conservative movement. However, Baldwin was a humanist. The solution was in the heart, not at the ballot box.

“It doesn't matter any longer what you do to me. You can put me in jail. You can kill me. By the time I was 17, you have done everything that you could do to me. The problem now is - how are you going to save yourselves?” AAPB, ibid

So, this led me to the query: how does racism harm me, personally? I’m not talking here about the pain it causes Black people and how I recognize that is unfair. That is not enough because I can walk away from that; I have walked away from that over and over in my life. One manifestation of White privilege is that we can do so. Blacks, and other people of color, don’t have that luxury no matter how much they might want to do so. The consequences of race follow them everywhere. If I am to stay engaged in this concern I need something that is much more personal, I need skin in the game – not a pun but a metaphor. I need to be invested.

So, I’ve sat with that query as I hope others will. The first manifestation of an answer was simply the

way my mind runs around in circles when I contemplate racism in our country. It is clearly our original sin. Nothing we have done in almost 250 years has really addressed it. Civil war and protests, both violent and peaceful, have led to legal changes but these have not changed hearts, not enough of them at least. I want to work on pieces of it but that feels like trying to capture Niagara Falls with a dixie cup. The whole thing is crazy making and that is personal. I am wracked with useless guilt for not doing more. And, I don’t want to look – that is what makes me one of Baldwin’s moral monsters.



Photo: John Greenler

Then there is this: There is that Black woman outside the Coop asking for money. Should I give it to her? Is she deserving? I prefer to give to organizations because they can figure out how best to respond to individuals in need. Nevertheless, what does it mean just to turn away, or to say ‘no’ when I am asked if I have some money to spare even though I have lots of money in my pocket? Should I have to give money to every person who asks? Is it really about race or is it about poverty? Would I – do I – treat White people asking for money the same? Could I just have a conversation with the person and try to understand their situation? Do they want that? Is it condescending? Give them money or not; don’t make them suffer you for it.

Crazy making – that is what makes this personal for me.

I am part of a group of old, White guys who go out to lunch once a month. We have been friends a long

time, some of us for over 50 years, most of us for at least 30 years. This is a group that is politically active, socially aware and have each worked for justice in his own way. Yet, we still struggle with discussions about race, and most recently about violent protests.

This has become personal for others in the group as well. Two years ago, Ted's daughter adopted a Black baby boy, who Ted now loves dearly. So, Ted is thinking about the risk his grandchild is at in future encounters with the police, or simply with other White people. He may be thinking about the conversations they will have about what the young man should do, why this is even an issue and what Ted has done about it. This has become very personal for Ted.

Michael's son is a cop. I watched Michael's son grow up playing with my children. He is not evil – I don't believe people are evil. He is as appalled as I am by what he has seen other cops do. However, he is at risk from those small numbers of protesters who would personalize the systemic racism and seek to harm law enforcement officers. He is at risk of succumbing to the systemic racism himself. It is good that Michael's son is a cop; it makes me think about how I talk about law enforcement officers. There are many ways to become a moral monster.

As part of a workshop on 'Decolonizing our Future' at this year's Friends General Conference Gathering we learned how 'divide and rule' was a key aspect of the colonial system. However, the benefit of the colonial system did not accrue equally to all Whites. In the days when cotton was king, the benefit went to the plantation owners, to the owners of textile mills in the north and to those who financed the

business. Today the benefits go increasingly to a smaller group of "owners." While many Whites did not, and, still do not benefit from this system, they can be pulled along with the reminder that at least they are not those other people.

"My liberation is tied up in your liberation," we were reminded at the workshop. But I don't need to be liberated, do I? I am 'well-to-do', not scraping by day-to-day to feed myself; I must be safe. I only need to look at our politics to recognize that I am not. The inequality and polarization that is part of the design of the colonial system has led us to the brink of autocracy. We have seen voting rights threatened, in large part at the direction of the very wealthy elite. As a result, the consequences for our country are not hard to imagine. There is something for me, for us, to be liberated from in this struggle. The fight right now looks like one on behalf of Black people and other people of color, but it is really a fight for all of us who would salvage our country. As Baldwin asked, "how are you going to save yourselves?"

This is personal.

Living Gratitude

Travis DuPriest

Kenosha-Racine Worship Group

I get a "Word for the Day" from a website called Gratefulness (gratefulness.org). I usually read it early in the morning while I'm sitting in silence in my favorite chair having a cup of coffee, reading or meditating.

Gratefulness is centered on the spiritual wisdom of Brother David Steindl-Rast, whose primary themes are gratitude and grateful living. His themes parallel Meister Eckhart's famous line: "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."

Sometimes, it's the things closest to us that we forget to be grateful for or to express gratitude for. It took me quite a long time, for example, before I came to the realization that the very chair, the very cup of coffee, the very time I had to sit and read, the very quiet of the early morning, the puppy in my lap

Upcoming Events

Virtual Fall Interim Session

October 23-25, 2020

- Friday evening: Interactive session
- Saturday: 4 sessions including business, and a focus on the Doctrine of Discovery
- Sunday morning: Business and Worship

See northernyearlymeeting.org for details

trying to keep me from reading the paper – all of these are things for which I am grateful.

The more things we can find for which to be grateful; and, the more often we remember to express our Gratitude, the closer and closer we come to Living Gratitude.

Even then, the greatest gift of Gratitude is yet to come. That gift is best expressed in a beautiful line from one of my favorite poets, George Herbert, in his poem titled “Gratefulness”: “Thou that has given me so much, give me one more thing; a grateful heart.”

So, we come to see the thing closest to us for which we are grateful is having a spirit of gratefulness itself.

Thoughts of a Quaker Treasurer

Dan O'Keefe

Milwaukee Friends Monthly Meeting

For the past eleven years, my strange world as an accountant has been entwined with the lives of the “peculiar people,” the Quakers. This unusual word is particularly meaningful. I know it describes my world. When I first heard the term, it seemed judgmental, a negative, but when I looked closer, it was clearly a positive, an invitation to understand. It has many synonyms: distinctive, unique, different, unusual, or special. “Peculiar” beckons the curious. It can lead to a thoughtful, inquisitive conversation. When peculiarities are discussed, distinctive ideas can result.

Corporate Peculiarities

When first becoming a Quaker, I was surprised by how much money Milwaukee Monthly Meeting gives away each year. It certainly makes sense. With no clergy to pay, there is extra money. A formal process had been developed to carefully decide which local nonprofit would receive assistance. In addition, there are funds given to numerous Quaker organizations by means of the annual budgeting process. Long-time Quakers confirmed that this is a common practice among non-programmed meetings.

Northern Yearly Meeting (NYM) is made up of non-programmed meetings and worship groups in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and the Dakotas. NYM funds its activities from event fees and meeting and worship contributions. A significant part of its budget is committed to the support of other Quaker organizations. An unusual practice I observed was that NYM forwards its funds to very nearly the same organizations that local meetings and worship groups support. This practice is also common among yearly meetings.

At the five annual Friends General Conference gatherings that I have attended, programming content was particularly unusual. Workshops mostly focus on spirituality, service, and projects. I was not able to identify workshops that addressed the complexities of life in a spiritual community. I did not see workshops that clearly addressed handling conflict. Nothing about committees. Nothing about bringing new members into the fold. Nor anything about helping people stay. On top of all that, there were no workshops about the many challenges of pastoral care within our Quaker meetings.



Photo: Public Domain

My Peculiar Experience

What is important about spending habits and the nature of program content? I would love to jump right in and offer an explanation, but as a Quaker, I must give some context. Let me describe a more complete picture of my experience.

In 2009, when my membership in the Milwaukee Monthly Meeting was formally accepted, I joined the finance committee and later served as Treasurer. My Quaker involvement over time expanded to include a term as Treasurer for Northern Yearly

Meeting, and I became part of a steering committee attempting to form a national business/Quaker affinity group.

In the course of pursuing new responsibilities and my own interests, I was very happy at the Milwaukee Meeting. I met Jane Harris, and at the age of 64, became a married man. Jane and I have been enriched by our involvement in an ongoing spiritual nurture group of fourteen years. At local, yearly and national gatherings, I lead discussions chiefly about financial matters. I regularly attended adult religious education events and monthly business meetings at Milwaukee Meeting. Other activities involved conferences at Earlham College, Friends Fiduciary Corporation and the White Privilege Conference.

However, a restlessness began to stir in my heart. These feelings were expressed by unsettling images and feelings. I recalled feeling helpless as I fumbled attempts at pastoral care. I felt unable to respond productively to inappropriate behavior in committee meetings, during worship and in the monthly meeting for worship with attention to business. I felt unable to contribute to some committees, either as a committee member or as convener. I simply felt inadequate. I wondered if I was the only person who felt this way. During this time of self-doubt, I realized I needed significant education, workshops and training to contribute to my spiritual community.

Bringing together the Personal and Corporate

It turned out that my experiences were not unique. A Quaker seminary student and Cadbury Scholar, Windy Cooler, through a formal interviewing process, has documented internal difficulties within meetings and worship groups across eight yearly meetings. [See *NYM Journal* Vol.1, Issue 2] For example, she learned that at many meetings, Ministry and Counsel would spend months discussing the same person. In addition, pastoral committees would make blundering, hurtful mistakes by making commitments they could not carry out. In fact, her research documented a small number of instances when a careless pastoral care committee harmed a member outright. When Windy described her results, I learned that many other Quakers are stumbling around too. Clearly, these

kinds of problems are not helpful to our individual Quaker communities. Her research is groundbreaking. Her work can wake our individual communities to the presence of these very personal difficulties. Also important in her research is the suggestion that someone from outside a meeting may be more able to provide a better setting for one-to-one interviews.

This is where this Quaker Treasurer offers a new approach to understanding the complexities of spiritual life in our communities. Simply put, I suggest that financially able monthly meetings consider stopping or reducing their contributions to nonprofits. This suggestion may seem radical. After all, providing financial support for the good work of outside groups is part of who we are. This task may seem simple to carry out, but **we Quakers don't like to spend money on ourselves.** Many will feel it is simply selfish to spend money **on ourselves.** I would emphasize that while we help outside groups make the community better and stronger; we also need to help ourselves become better and stronger.

We are very proud of our silent form of worship and our individual social justice activities. However, those two arenas are only starting places to develop a strong, close-knit spiritual family. Workshops on conflict management, working with people and their problems, running meetings, leadership, and developing committees are skills to be learned. Very few people show up at a meetinghouse with those skills. I know I don't have those skills. There are universities and nonprofits that offer workshops and seminars on these subjects. Outside professionals can remind us that people skills are important to any



Photo: John Greenler

Northern Yearly Meeting
c/o Madison Friends Meeting
1704 Roberts Ct
Madison, WI 53711-2029

group. Meetings can help members attend specialized workshops that focus on spiritual communities as well. Yearly meetings can provide workshops on these complex issues also.

With regard to the annual gathering, the lack of community building workshops was a great, and at the same time, disappointing surprise for me. I was compelled to look further. In early 2019, I looked over the financial reports of three national Quaker organizations. The American Friends Service Committee and the Friends Committee on National Legislation together have net assets of nearly \$75 million to provide aid and lobby for legislation to make a better world. In contrast, the Friends General Conference has net assets of \$5 million available to help strengthen Quaker meetings and worship groups across North America. The amount of \$5 million is quite small. This awkward imbalance of financial resources at the national level demonstrates that our national leaders also need deep reflection.

We need to look within our local and yearly meetings and, at national gatherings to complete an

accurate picture of how we relate to one another. It is always a difficult challenge. However, doing the hard work of honest self-reflection is powerful and can go a long way to develop strong ties within a meeting.

(Author's Note: I offer these thoughts as a heartfelt attempt to meet NYM Journal's "effort to give life to the values we hold as Quakers." My goal is to offer another way of looking at our Quaker communities, as seen through the eyes of an accountant.)

Visit the NYM Website

www.northernyearlymeeting.org

for more information about NYM including Publications, Sessions and a listing of NYM Meetings and Worship Groups. You may wish to subscribe to the monthly NYM e-News for regular updates, announcements and resources.

Visit "Events" on the NYM website for updates on online worship.