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Thoughts from an African American Quaker on the Issue of Reparations for our Debt to African American Descendants of American Slaves

~James Varner~

James is co-clerk of the New England Yearly Meeting on Racial, Social & Economic Justice. Residing in Old Town Maine with his wife Florence and a member of Orono Friends Meeting, he revived the Greater Bangor National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), serves as a Maine Human Rights Commissioner appointed by the governor, and has a multiprong relationship with his alma mater, the University of Maine.

Who will hear my cries, been crying for more than three hundred years—been in pain, been hurting, been suffering. Been had my spouse, children, friends, and loved ones just taken away from me without consideration or regard for my feelings as a human being.

After all, we are not wild animals. We have feelings just like you. Been stripped of my name and true identity. You had no right to do this to me. What is that you say? It was not you, but your forefathers? You are involved friend. You have some of your forefathers' wealth in your bank accounts. You benefit from white privilege. Who is out there? I hear voices. Not sure they are civilized human voices. Is there anyone out there who cares about me and my people as human beings? Speak truth to power. Speak truth to power. You are the power. Speak to yourselves. You know right from wrong. It's wrong for you not to even want to think about your debt in the form of reparation payments to African Americans who are descendants of slaves.

What are reparations? A general definition for

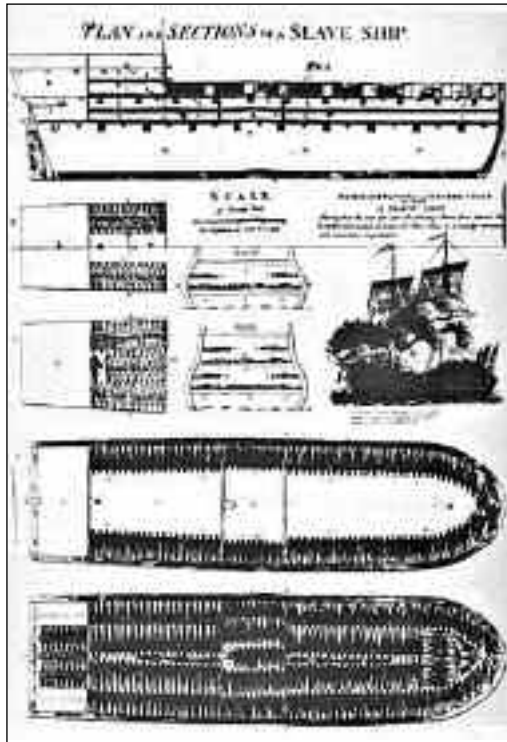
reparations is: the act of making amends. Satisfaction for wrongs or injury. The payment of money for damages that have been done is one way of making amends. In this case, reparations for African Americans, we have to decide on an amount of payment and from whom. We also must decide to whom the payments will be made. In both cases we must decide over what period of time the payments will be made and received. There is certainly no easy way to deal with these aspects of the issue. We do have examples of reparations that we can use as models to follow such as:

- The Canadian government is currently paying reparations to Native Canadians for wrongs done to them going back for several centuries.
- The U.S. government is currently paying reparations to descendants of Japanese people who were imprisoned during the Second World War.
- The state of Florida is presently paying reparations to descendants of African Americans who were murdered in the Rosewood, Florida massacre of black Americans.
- The state of Oklahoma is presently paying reparations to the descendants of African Americans who were killed when whites burned a thriving black business community in Tulsa, Oklahoma to the ground wrongly on a false rumor and because they were jealous of the very successful black business community.



Rally in Boston after the Los Angeles uprising, 1992, photo by Skip Schiel

How is New England Yearly Meeting connected to this issue? We are connected because our history as well as general history clearly documents that members of the Society of Friends were involved in the slave trade business



and profited from it. It is also clearly documented that some Quakers owned slaves and other Quakers who did not believe in slavery did nothing. They just looked the other way for the most part.

It is also documented that most Quakers did not own slaves or believe slavery was right. It should be noted that a number of Quakers were killed for helping slaves escape from the south through the underground railroad, and in some cases the entire family was killed which sadly included little

children sometimes. Some Quaker wealth was acquired from the slave system in America. White Quakers also profited from white privilege and continue to benefit even today from white privilege and



From The Middle Passage, by Tom Feelings

personal wealth. We in New England Yearly Meeting are connected to the profits from the slave system in America because

we are members of the Society of Friends. As members of the Society of Friends we owe a debt to descendants of African Americans who were slaves. We as Quakers are noted for speaking truth to power and doing the right thing even if it is an unpopular position, which we take alone. Many times others realize that our position is the right one and join us later.

The New England Yearly Meeting Committee on Racial, Social, and Economic Justice formally known as the NEYM Committee on Prejudice and Poverty administers the Freedmen's fund. This fund, as of our January 31, 2004 meeting had about \$7,000. The guidelines for this fund generally say the monies should be used to educate descendants of slaves at black institutions

Is there method to our (editorial) madness?

In our committee's name—Racial, Social and Economic justice—we express our mandate: to examine conditions and propose solutions to our racial, social, and economic injustices. Within our Quaker body (NEYM in particular) and in our wider society (especially that of North America), these injustices are legion, they are myriad, they are interconnected, and they are focussed: the absence of justice. Drawing upon the wisdom of Martin Luther King, Jr, we tackle the triplet of racism, poverty, and militarism (conveniently leaving the latter to the NEYM Peace and Social Concerns Committee).

So in this issue of the Freedom & Justice Crier (expanded to 20 pages, intending next spring to follow with an emailed version, with a few hundred print copies for those without email), we reflect that range. There is method to our madness. We offer a range of opinion and topic.

We begin with Jim Varner's provocative cry to consider reparations to African American descendants of slaves (reparation from the word repair, repair relations). Followed by a story from Greg Williams about a model-setting initiative in New Bedford. Donna McDaniel then reflects on her experience writing a book about Quakers and racism with Vanessa Julye. I've excerpted from Allan Kohnman's powerful and controversial account of Quakers and Jews. Lisa Graustein and Don Campbell then offer us two views about the sweat lodge issue at Friends General Gathering, shining new light on this topic.

We borrow from Tim Wise to learn what whites think they know about blacks. Humor and insight interweave in his account. And finally, but by no means least, stimulated by the recent question of Friends United Meeting's personnel policies defining marriage as between a man and a woman, Joanna Cole returns to John Woolman to consider our Equality testimony.

We pair each word set with an image set, independent and complimentary. We honor the image as well as the word.

We also offer you some resources for further consideration, and invite you to respond if you're moved by any of our words or graphics. We welcome your suggestions. How might we better address the madness of our current experience?

—Skip Schiel

of higher education. I suggest we use the Freedmen's Fund as NEYM's first reparations payment to benefit descendants of African American slaves. The NEYM Committee on Racial, Social, and Economic Justice could develop a plan for how the funds could be administered and added to from NEYM's budget. We would have to consider monthly meetings or individual member/attender donations to a reparations fund.

I strongly recommend the reading of THE DEBT by Randall Robinson for members of NEYM to help us as we consider the issue of reparations to African Americans who are descendants of African American slaves.

Here are some of the main reasons I think we should support reparations for African Americans:

- Two hundred forty-six years (1619-1865) of forced uncompensated labor.
- Economic prisoners (African slaves) used to produce the American Gross National Product (GNP) for the colonies through the period of American independence.
- For almost 100 years "quasi legal apartheid" against African Americans (1865-1964) and today to some extent.
- For experiencing and surviving almost three hundred fifty years of domestic terrorism.
- For unwanted sexual exploitation of African women in America by white slave holders.

- For the lynching of thousands of African men in America.
- For the inhuman treatment and murders of thousands of Africans in America.
- For the permanent socialization into a negative self-concept and sense of powerlessness among Africans in America.
- For socialization and exposing ten generations of Africans in America to the psychological trauma of slavery and the post slavery aftermath.
- Some 15 million Africans were taken from Africa. They were slaves here in America brutalized, murdered, raped and tortured. They were not allowed to receive an education. They were viewed as less than human. The U.S. Constitution still has a clause which says African Americans are only three-fifths of a man. (Not a whole human being!) This clause has been amended.

- Our government from 1789 through 1865 constitutionally and statutorily sanctioned slavery.

In closing, I don't think I am being biased as an African American member of NEYM. I think further that before we start getting someone else's house in order we must get our own house in order. I think that we must speak truth to power, and I think we must first speak truth to ourselves. To our own selves be true!

Friends Outreach Moving in a New Direction

~Greg Williams~

Greg Williams is a member of New Bedford Meeting, having grown up in NYC. He was on AFSC staff from 1975 - 84 in southeast Massachusetts. For many years in Boston—and now in New Bedford—he has been actively initiating outreach to communities of color.

The urban landscape demands our attention. There is a Holy Presence living within us all that seeks to empower. The daily bread of love, hope, and justice must guide our vision.

There are many ways to look at this ministry of outreach. It is social, political and economic. These are important perspectives in any urban center. But for me the most important component is spiritual. It is at once deeply personal and communal.

I think back to my first centered meetings in New Bedford twenty five years ago, and centered encounters at New England Yearly Meeting, or with Young Friends. There is a world outside of our Meeting borders that thirst for the Spirit! Where are we?

Putting a progressive vision on things spiritual is not an easy task in these times. On the surface things spiritual appear to be caught up in a negative, often mean spirited conservative agenda. My first task as I promote a positive spiritual vision is to be deeply engaged in that spirit myself. As a Quaker I have to go deep. I have been influenced by a mix of traditions, Catholic Left, Judaism, Evangelical, Zen, Native Spirituality, and the Black Church, all inform my vision. The deep opening of the Religious Society of Friends needs to be treasured by its members. In that depth, with its mix, out of a powered silence comes a loving grace that touches souls. John Woolman informs us, "There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. It is however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from

any where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren in the best sense of the expression." (1)

I am excited by the potential of Friends Outreach to touch the lives of people who don't traditionally find their way to Quaker Meetings. This is about more than signs or newspaper ads, there has to be direct contact. I believe over time this intense encounter will increase our number and deepen our complexion as a Friends community in New Bedford.



New Bedford Meeting House

Steve Pedigo with CFF children

During our first worship/workshop, "Nonviolence in an Age of Terror" (on April 1, 2005) Lee Charlton, President of the NAACP in New Bedford, spoke glowingly of the role Quakers played in the struggle against

slavery. I was not surprised by his words. I have heard similar sentiment many times. Our reputation earned or unearned precedes us. It is a gift we are trying to do something with in New Bedford. Like Friends across New England, we are not as seasoned as we should be on a range of racial concerns and other issues. There may well be missteps, but these are risks (we should have taken long ago), that we need to take now.

New Bedford Quakers have a large Meeting House with a small membership. We are drawing encouragement and support from other Meetings in Southeastern Massachusetts. Hopefully these efforts will be of mutual benefit

for all Friends. We gather monthly for a Barclay Potluck, time to share a good meal, explore a few creative thoughts, and enjoy the company of our Religious Society of Friends.

Our basic program includes three sections. The first is nonviolence workshops and training, related to community concerns.



Our first community workshop will be with the Veterans Transition House. Secondly, our work on economic development will use the "Earth Charter" as a working blueprint and focus on small things that can happen now. The third component is life skills seminars with youth including a job development resource center at the meeting.

- On June 3rd we held a Silent Vigil of Prayer in front of the Main Post Office downtown. We remembered the victims of war and made links to the ongoing violence touching New Bedford youth.
- On June 17 we held our second worship/workshop focused on John Woolman's "A Plea for the Poor".
- We are working on the development of a Peace Garden with area youth that will focus on the young victims of urban violence.
- Counseling on Conscientious Objection for draft age men and women.
- Friends Outreach will seek to respond to issues that arise out of basic community concerns.

In a few short months we have raised interest in the spirituality and the way of Friends. It will be several years before we can begin to measure long term success. This work, this effort has to be developed over several years. We invite your prayers, your financial support, and your active engagement as way opens.

¹ Worship, John Woolman, PG5-6, Pendle Hill Pamphlet

Donations to Friends Outreach should be made out to New Bedford Monthly Meeting and earmarked for Friends Outreach. They can be sent to New Bedford Friends Meeting, 83 Spring Street, New Bedford, MA, 02740-5934

For more information: 508-990-0710

New Bedford history (Frederick Douglass once lived in New Bedford)—

www.s-t.com/daily/11-01/11-04-01/n03lo180.htm

New Bedford background—

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Bedford_Massachusetts

"With Changes at Cabrini-Green, Longtime Ministry (Chicago Fellowship of Friends) Closes"—

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/05/AR2005060501272.html

Perpetuating Racism: Propaganda and the "Black Scare"

~Donna McDaniel~

Donna McDaniel of Framingham Friends Meeting and Vanessa Julye of Central Philadelphia Meeting (NEYM's 2004 keynote speakers) are writing a history of Quaker-African American relationships tentatively entitled Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship to be published by QuakerPress of FGC. (They report they have completed a first draft and are now revising—and revising.) In this essay, Donna shares one of the learnings that can help us understand how it can be that racism continues to exist in our country.

Of all that I am learning from working on our book, one lesson that particularly stands out is the deliberate campaign of the 1800s to portray the African American as inherently inferior and incapable of being free.

The motivation for this propaganda effort—aptly described by one historian as "the Black Scare"¹—was the desire to continue the economic exploitation of people of African descent, whether enslaved or free. Those who benefited from the system, northerners as well as southerners, purposely instilled fear about what America would be like if African Americans were given equal rights. They were all too successful in convincing the American public that abolitionists and the people they wished to free were intent on promoting racial mixing. "Amalgamation" became a dreaded word.

At a time when publications were becoming more widely available, popular books and newspapers had few qualms about claiming the United States only for people of European descent. The "scientific evidence" from anthropologists that they published "proved" that there was a natural racial hierarchy with the superior Caucasians at the top and primitive and

innately uncultured Africans at the bottom. Cartoons of the day, including those of Thomas Nast, famous as the country's first political cartoonist, viciously depicted African American men as buffoons in southern legislative chambers or lusting after women of European descent at the era's fancy balls.²

The message was clear: the races were to be separate. Mixing was "a sin against nature which would lead to the creation of biological throwbacks."³ Clearly those who argued this chose to ignore abundant evidence to the contrary found on most plantations—the children of interracial unions—nor did they acknowledge the lasciviousness of the men who fathered them.

The fear of amalgamation was purposely exploited by northern community leaders—business men, newspaper publishers, and clergy who saw abolitionists as "fanatical."⁴ In an odd choice of epithets, those who wanted to end enslavement were accused of "favoring 'amalgamation, equality, and fraternity."⁵ Rumors also circulated that abolitionists adopted African American children and sympathetic clergy married mixed couples. These claims left the abolitionists in an odd position—they wanted to defend themselves against untruths, but were aware that doing so would make it appear

that they, too, found such behavior objectionable.⁶



Even the abolitionists themselves, as fervent as their desire to end enslavement was, rarely believed that the people they were working to free should be considered equal. The conservative Quaker journal, the Friend, offered this distinction in 1840. One of the "greatest mistakes" abolitionists could make was to confuse fighting enslavement with fighting prejudice. The first should be their sole goal, the second to be left to "the gradual but certain effects of advancing light and knowledge."⁷

African Americans understood the situation well. As one editor of an African American newspaper wrote, people of European descent joined the abolition movement believing that "it stood for abstract principles to be applied to the South, without requiring them to battle the prejudices in their own hearts."⁸ Another leader of African descent asked if it wasn't "strange" that social equality was not listed as one of

Slave auction, based on a sketch by Mr. Davis, appearing in Harper's Weekly, July 13, 1861

the objectives of the American Anti-Slavery Society.⁹

In fact, all but a few abolitionists of European descent stopped short of purely social and personal contact with African Americans.¹⁰ Many even strongly objected to "any association with colored persons in their Anti-Slavery labors."¹¹ (While by the 1830s the abolitionist organizations were not solely Quaker, most were, as one historian described them, "Quaker fronts" or had "strong Quaker backing."¹²)

It was a few women abolitionists of European descent—mostly Quaker—who were the exceptions: Abby Kelly Foster, Angelina and Sarah Grimké, Amy Post, Elizabeth Buffum Chace, Lucy Buffum, Abby Hopper Gibbons, and especially Lucretia Mott, whose family had long-lasting personal friendships with many African Americans.¹³ Refusing to be intimidated, the Quaker women accepted Sarah Grimké's call to treat people of African descent as their social equals and appear with them in public and invite them to their homes.¹⁴

But for the most part, Friends of European descent were not immune to the pervasive propaganda of the 1800s. They "only reluctantly opened their religious Society to colored members, and they wished no more than other whites of their day and generation to associate with different races on terms of social intimacy."¹⁵ One leading Friend had observed that membership brought with it "the privilege of intermarriage," a possibility Friends found "objectionable."¹⁶ Even committed abolitionists like Levi Coffin and his cousin, Elijah Coffin, long-time clerk of the Orthodox Indiana Yearly Meeting, were opposed; Elijah used the threat of racial mixing to justify his support of colonization—the plan to transport freed people to another part of the country or overseas.¹⁷

The racial climate deteriorated dramatically in the nineteenth century, fueled both by the "Black Scare" and the growing numbers of European immigrants who considered people African descent a threat to their jobs. The 1838 burning of the Pennsylvania Hall in Philadelphia by a mob incensed at the sight of people of African and European descent associating together was not the first act of violence against those free Africans and abolitionists—nor would it be the last. The attacks that night on homes of African Americans and abolitionists¹⁸ were repeated in city after city in the pre-Civil War years. Rampaging crowds destroyed homes and businesses, beating and even killing their occupants at will. As they would in the last half of the century when barbaric lynchings



became commonplace, the "better" classes of society gave tacit approval. To the great misfortune of us all, the "Black Scare" has been all too successful. An insidious legacy casting doubts on the abilities and character of people of African descent, indeed anyone of non-European descent, still severely limits their lives—and ours, even into the twenty-first century.

¹Forrest Wood, *The Black Scare: The*

Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968. Of course, racial prejudice already existed, but this campaign used "scientific evidence" to back up those prejudices and spread them widely.

²Examples on: blackhistory.harpweek.com/7/illustrations/Reconstruction;loc.harpweek.com/images/rotation/3b38367v3w.jpg; or www.csu-bak.edu/~gsantos/img0056.html.

³Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, p. 15. By the time of the Revolution virtually every state's "black codes" prohibited sexual contact between the races. Infractions brought harsh punishments, particularly on the person of African descent.

⁴Carleton Mabee, *Black Freedom: The Nonviolent Abolitionists from 1830 Through the Civil War*, p. 27.

⁵Fawn M. Brodie, "Who Defends an Abolitionist?" in Martin Duberman, *The Antislavery Vanguard*, p. 62.

⁶Mabee, p. 107.

⁷Mabee, p. 92.

⁸Quarles, pp. 47-48.

⁹Leon F. Litwak, *North of Slavery*, p. 227.

¹⁰Quarles, pp. 38-39. The New Hampshire Anti-Slavery Society made a point of specifically declaring that they would "discountenance" intermarriage "expressly and distinctly." And, allegations to the contrary, the abolitionists of European descent were, in fact, "almost entirely without exception, not given to marrying across the color line," as Quarles observed.

¹¹Larry Gara, "Who Was An Abolitionist?" in Duberman, p. 40.

¹²Lester Scherer, *Slavery and the Churches in Early America, 1619-1819*, p. 131. No women of either race were allowed as members. They started organizations of their own. Donald M. Jacobs, *Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists in Boston*, p. 88.

¹³Margaret Hope Bacon describes the Motts' relationship with Robert and Harriett Purvis and others in interesting detail in *Quaker History*, Vol. 92, Fall 2003, pp. 1-17.

¹⁴Quarles, p. 28.

¹⁵Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, pp. 120-121.

¹⁶Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom*, p. 180.

¹⁷Thomas Hamm, April Beckman, Marissa Florio, Kristi Giles, and Marie Hopper, "Quakers and African Americans in the Middle West, 1800-1870." Unpublished paper. Earlham College, 2000, pp. 15-17.

¹⁸Jean Yellin and John Horne. *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, pp. 285-289. The well-appointed new hall had been built by abolitionists who were unwelcome elsewhere.

Jews in the Christian Testament

~Allan Kahrman~

Allan Kahrman has taught English and history at Massasoit Community College since 1970. From a Jewish background, he joined Friends in 1973 and was disturbed to learn the one-sided and antithetical views he feels Friends have toward Israel. We excerpt from his very informative and provocative booklet, *Quakers and Jews*, available at the YM bookstore or from Allan personally. He can be reached at 617-964-3178 or allankahrman@comcast.net. He lives in Newton Highlands with his wife Carolyn Stone and son Adam. © 2004, Allan Kahrman

One of my principal theses is that anti-Semitism is deeply woven into the fabric of the Christian bible and the Christian tradition. Christian teachings about Judaism are not accidental, peripheral, or a tragic misinterpretation of Judaism. They

are at the core of the Christian message. "As long as the Christian Church regards itself as the successor of Israel, as the new people of God substituted in the place of the old, and as long as the Church proclaims Jesus as the one mediator without whom there is no salvation, no theological space is left for other religions, and, in particular, no theological validity is left for Jewish religion" (Gregory Baum, introduction to Reuther, p. 5). Indeed, anti-Semitism so deeply permeates Christianity that one wonders if one can reject the anti-Semitism without rejecting Christianity altogether.

In the early years of Christianity, prior to the creation of the Christian Testament, Judaism and Christianity read the Jewish bible in different ways. For the Jews the promises of redemption were still awaiting fulfillment; for the Christians they had recently become fulfilled by Jesus. Thus it was almost from the beginning that the claim of

Jesus as Christ could only be accomplished by refuting the message of Judaism, by attempting to convince Jew and Christian alike that the Jewish reading of the Jewish testament was simply wrong.

As Gregory Baum has summarized, "The Jews read the Scriptures literally, yet their true meaning was not in the letter but in the spirit. The Jews, according to this Christian refutation, were attached to the letter, to externals, to the shell, while the Christians were open to the spirit, the inward content, the deeper meaning of God's

promises. The Christians, troubled by the Jewish refusal, tried to find in the Scriptures the prediction of 'the blindness' of Israel. They read the history of Israel as a series of failures and infidelities, which had now climaxed in the rejection of Jesus as the one who fulfilled the scriptural promises. The Jews had always been blind, the argument went; they never understood the meaning of the Scriptures they never listened to and knew the God who spoke to them.... The Jews, it was said, were attached only to the law; they mistook the outward dress for the inner substance; they were blind to the

promises of grace announced in the Scriptures, which culminated in Jesus and found their fulfillment in the Christian community. The substance of the Scriptures was available only in the Church. The Christians were the true Israel." (Baum in Reuther, p. 12).

Soon the Jews would embody all that is



*"Answerest Thou the High Priest So?";
from the painting by Heemskerck*

undreamed, evil, and demonic in the world.

The key event in the story of Jesus would become the crucifixion and the reaction to it by his followers. They could easily have interpreted the crucifixion as the failure of his messianic mission. After all, Jesus late in his life had thought of himself as the Messiah ("I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the father

those whom the prophets themselves constantly criticized, those who refused to accept the message of God as sent through his messengers. These contemporary enemies were the chief priests and scribes of Israel. They did not accept that Jesus had risen, sitting at the right hand of God until he chose to reveal himself to all. They were the builders rejecting the stone that had already become the chief cornerstone. They, the heirs of apostasy, had now killed the Messiah himself. They were scribes and hypocrites, fools and blind, and had no hope of salvation. (Matthew 23:13-19)

One finds examples of Jew hatred throughout the gospels. Luke contrasts The Good Samaritan with the selfish Jew (Luke 10:31-37). Matthew and Luke say that it will be easier for the residents of Sodom than for the unbelieving Jews (Matthew 11: 20-24, Luke 10 13-15, 11:30). Matthew and Luke tell us that the Gentiles will come from the East and the West to sit at the messianic banquet, while the sons of the Kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness (Matthew 8: 11-12; Luke 13:25).

Sometimes the Christian testament delights in turning prophetic texts on their heads. The dramatic prophecy that Israel will be a light unto the nations is made into a text that Jesus will be the light in contrast to an unbelieving Israel (Acts 15:14, Acts 28:28). The writers of the Christian testament are certain that the prophecy of Isaiah (e.g. 42:6) must refer to Jesus. Israel not only rejects Jesus but tries to kill him. Jesus himself states that, "A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house" (Matthew: 13:57). Over and over he castigates the Jews as "scribes and Pharisees" (Matthew: 23:13-29). Finally Matthew has Pilate proclaim that he is innocent of the blood of Jesus, only to have the Jews state; "His blood be upon us, and on our children" (Matthew 27: 24-25). 12

All Biblical references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, except when noted.

Further reading: Ruether, Rosemary, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1979



Golgotha, engraving by H. Hoffmann

except through me..."John 14:6, NRSV), and his entrance to Jerusalem created an expectation that this act would coincide with God's intervention into history. Instead Jesus was quickly executed. No miracle seemed to have occurred.

Indeed Jesus' followers decided not only that he was the Messiah, but that the crucifixion proved that he was. His body was missing from his grave, and since it had been guarded, he must have risen into heaven. When he then came back to earth to reassure his followers, they could be certain he was the Messiah.

His followers then began to search the Bible for corroboration of their beliefs, and soon found their proof texts. The Messiah had enemies, heirs of

filling that void for many years.

Yet, what is the cost?

Cultural appropriation is the process of a dominant group taking—with or without permission—some aspect of a non-dominant group's culture or practice and modifying it to fit the dominant group's needs. Our country is filled with examples of cultural appropriation—everything from the music of Elvis and Madonna to foundational elements of our Constitution and penitentiary system. The "Quaker Sweat Lodge Workshop" fits this definition: a Friend was trained and granted permission by a Medicine Man to offer the Sweat Lodge



Why include this picture of a Thanksgiving dinner? For more information about this picture, see the introductory paragraph.

and the Friend changed aspects of the traditional Sweat Lodge to fit Quaker practices. For example, traditionally, men and women do not participate in Sweats together nor do women participate while menstruating.

This gender and sex division is counter to the Quaker understanding of testimony of equality and so men and women (menstruating or not) participate together in the "Quaker Sweat Lodge Workshop."*

Members of the Mashpee Wampanoag and other Nations have been clear that for non-Native Peoples to appropriate sacred ceremonies is deeply damaging and wounding. It is one more step in a centuries-long process of non-Native Peoples taking what they want from Native Peoples, irrespective of the costs—to either party—of that taking. The Sweat Lodge is a ceremony central to the spiritual practices of a large number of Native Nations and Tribes. There are some Native people who are eager to share this and other ceremonies with non-Native peoples. There are many Native Peoples who do not believe sacred ceremonies should be performed or "sold" to non-Native peoples.

While I have been taught prayers in Hebrew by Jewish friends when invited to pray with them, I would never dream of presiding over a Bat Mitzvah or Yom Kippur service with our Young Friends. To do so, would be deeply disrespectful of Judaism and would leave the Young Friends with an ungrounded, shallow, and faulty notion of Judaism, irrespective of how we experienced those services. When I modify and use another's practice to meet my spiritual need, both the tradition I am borrowing from and I am hurt. The tradition I am borrowing from is disrespected by my hubris that I can "know" or "do" a part of a rich spiritual

tradition through one small, inaccurately practiced facet. I am hurt by the denial that my spiritual need can be filled from within my own tradition, by the spiritual cost of not fully respecting another's religion, and the missed opportunity for an even deeper experience.

I greatly enjoy my yoga class at the Y—I feel grounded and fully in my body when I finish it. Yet when I compare my understanding and experience of yoga with my Indian friends', the gulf of what I am missing becomes clear and I can hear the sadness or frustration in my friends' voices of all that has been lost and passed over. This doesn't detract from how my body feels after doing yoga, but it does change how I understand what I am (and am not) doing. My friends haven't asked that I stop doing Yoga, only that I remember what I am doing is exercise and that Yoga is a much deeper and richer discipline that goes far beyond a good work-out at the Y.

There is a difference between appropriation and Universalism. Appropriation takes without acknowledging the costs to both parties, and sometimes with the intention of respecting and honoring another culture or tradition.

Appropriation is so much a part of our culture in the United States that it often passes as good diversity work. Universalism, on the other hand, is the belief that God can speak to us and is present in all the peoples of the world. Universalism, therefore, requires real understanding and respectful learning about the diversity of the human spiritual experience, within the context of the world, and an obligation to ensure the cultural health, autonomy, and survival of all peoples. To respectfully learn about another's culture or tradition, I need be fully grounded in my own cultural/spiritual experience and my culture's contextualized relationship with that other culture.

So while the outward-looking Quaker in me hears the demand for justice restored to our collective relationship with Native Peoples, the inward-looking Quaker within me begs to know:

Is our own Religious Society so spiritually bankrupt that we must go outside our own traditions to provide spiritual nurture for our young people? I am terrified that the one of the most powerful spiritual, transformative, and Quaker-confirming experiences our young people name does not come from Quakerism. We have such a rich, vibrant, and spirit-filled history and faith; why are we not sharing it—with joy, passion, challenge, reverence—with our children?

Answering the Call with Action

We, as a Society, have three large charges laid before us in this situation.

One is to examine, in the words of one Young Friend, "what it is that we are not providing our young people with." We must begin to share our

spiritual lives more deeply and honestly with our young people, we must provide them with Quaker opportunities to experience the Living Spirit as a personally transformative power.

We must also examine how our expressions of Universalism can, if we are not careful, lead us into damaging practices of cultural appropriation. How do we seek that of God in all people while respecting and honoring that of God in all Peoples?

Finally, we must work to restore our collective relationship with Native Peoples and all Peoples. We live in a country built on a foundation of racism that has hurt all of us. We must begin the difficult and life-sustaining work of regaining our true human and spiritual connections to each other—restoring to the glory of creation all that has been hurt, damaged, and broken.

Don Campbell, long involved with American Indian experiences and helpful in bringing Native perspectives to Friends, lives in Northfield MA with his wife Judi Jones, and directs Don Campbell Associates, a solar energy consulting firm. Don is a member of Mt Toby meeting.

I attended the 'Quaker Sweat Lodge' in 1993 at the FGC

Gathering in Oklahoma. I was there for my first FGC Gathering, working with junior high youth, because a Hopi Elder, Thomas Banyacya, was going to speak. I have spent time before and since in intimate and personal settings with Indians.

As concerns about the sweat lodge rose I spoke about it with a range of people; Friends and Indians of many view points, depth psychologists and others. I now believe the present struggle Friends have for clarity has many threads, all of which are important alone, but which ultimately must be consistent with each other. These threads include Spiritual experience, youth, Western habits of thought, cultural appropriation, cross-cultural transmission of knowledge.

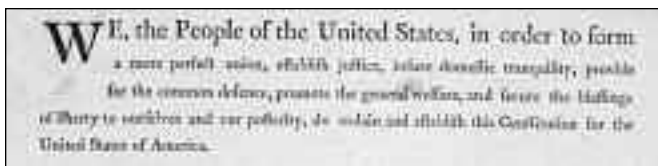
I do not have a particular outcome in mind about the sweat lodge itself. I am very sure that it is of great importance that we do the spiritual work amongst ourselves that this issue is calling us to. The gifts we uncover as we go deeper into this will be of great value to Friends and non-Friends alike.

There are many ways to be a Friend. As spiritual community, we talk about 'knowing experimentally' or as we would say today, experientially. Many people think we understand the experience of Spirit similarly. I am sure this is not so. I am equally sure that there are decent, well-meaning and committed Friends who are 'political Quakers'. By this I mean that they are a

This article is far too short to fully address

all the details of the history of the "Quaker Sweat Lodge Workshop;" of the concerns of the Mashpee Wampanoag; of the subtleties of cultural appropriation and influences cultures have on each other; and the broader debates and socio-historical contexts around all these issues. Please, talk about this, ask about it, and learn more about it.

*The Sweat Lodge ceremony is shared by many Native American nations and tribes. While core elements are common, variations in materials, ritual, and process vary regionally and culturally.



*Why include this quote from the US Constitution?
See the introductory paragraph.*

part of our Society because they find a compatible home given their political understandings and for whom the experience of Spirit is found in ethical considerations.

There are also Friends who have had deep experience with Spirit, both within the core traditions of Friends and elsewhere. Some use the language 'conversion experience' to describe their encounters with Spirit. For these people, Spiritual experience encompasses ethical and political concerns, but is more profound. This is the first and most fundamental difficulty for us on this issue. It challenges us to be clear about our understanding of the knowledge and experience of Spirit. This spills over into our care for our youth.

Our youth, especially high school and college youth, are looking at our extraordinarily dysfunctional world. They see the adults around them, you and me, as people who may have pretty good values but make an awful lot of trade-offs just to function in this world. They are understandably concerned over how they will fit into the present world and keep any sense of integrity, honor, peace and hope. Feeling marginal already, many are naturally attracted to the sweat lodge and other similar situations. They hope to find



*Quaker youth at Friends General Gathering, 2002
photo by Skip Schiel*

something to ground them in Spirit as they move forward with their lives. The question arises, "If the sweat lodge has become so important to so many FGC teenagers, how else can we meet their spiritual hunger?" The widespread occurrence of the sweat lodge in many cultures and the many correspondences in its practice speak to its power to create space for Spirit.

Our western habit of thought can also create difficulties. This is the very thing that we leave behind in a centered Meeting for Worship, but fall back into as daily life resumes. An example of this is our tendency to make problems generic. Life is not generic. It is only specific. Generalities are only useful in beginning to understand an issue. Many Friends have avoided the question of George Price and his credentials or lack thereof, saying "This is not about George". But it is. It is the sweat lodge he leads at FGC and elsewhere among Friends that is being challenged. It is also about our process as Friends in responding to this work and to the valid concerns about it elsewhere.

I believe it is necessary for those of us born into

the dominant 'class' to respond reflexively when it is suggested we are appropriating cultural material. But the reflex should be to stop and examine ourselves, not to assume guilt, unless appropriate.

People will feel pain, no matter what we resolve to do about the sweat lodge, and probably no matter how long it takes. This is liberating because we are free to take the time to do the necessary work. The thorniest part will be learning how to discern healthy cross-cultural transmission of knowledge from unhealthy transmission. This is specific to our process as Friends, to George Price's work and



to those who speak either for or against it. Considering this matter I know there are many layers of questions we as Friends will come to as we seek honest and spiritual understanding of the gift this controversy has brought to us. I look forward to the deepening work ahead.

For more views about this issue, see the *Freedom & Justice Crier*, summer 2004

Countering White Privilege & Racism

~Recommendations from the Working Parties on Racism of NEYM Ministry & Counsel & Framingham Meeting~

Two books for adults: *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones—Henry Townsend, an African American farmer, bootmaker, and former slave, becomes proprietor of his own plantation, including his own slaves. Ranging between the past and future and back again to the present, this novel weaves together the lives of freed and enslaved Africans, whites, and Indians—and allows us a deeper understanding of the enduring multidimensional world created by the institution of slavery. In *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, Barack Obama, the son of a white American mother and an African American father and now a US senator from Illinois, writes an elegant and compelling biography powerfully articulating America's racial battleground and tells of his search for his place in black America.

For young adults: *Trouble Don't Last* by Shelley Pearsall—Samuel, an eleven-year old Kentucky slave and Harrison, the elderly slave who helped raise him, attempt to escape to Canada via the Underground Railroad.

Try Amazon.com or alibris.com for these three books, used or new.

Rich resource: www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu reports on the project's studies such as "African Americans and Hispanics Feel Unwelcome in Metro Boston" or the implications of racial changes for social and economic opportunity within greater Boston's diverse population, and on Hispanic and African American national dropout rates.

Visit the NEYM website <<http://www.NEYM.org/ministryandcounsel/racism/index.html>>.

June 2005. Your ideas & comments welcome: music1@charter.net

Resources for learning more about American Indians

~Lisa Graustein~

Links (numerous sites about and related to Native American Indian issues, includes links to Nations, both those Federally recognized and not)

www.narf.org - Native American Rights Fund – updates Native American legal issues, you can sign up for a free e-mail action/alert newsletter.

www.pequotmuseum.org - Web page for the Mashantucket Pequot Museum in Connecticut, the web page contains many links and useful information, including a great virtual tour of the exhibits.

www.americanindian.si.edu - Web page for the American Indian Smithsonian Museum, information about the museum, national events, film lists, bookstore etc.

www.mashpeewampanoagtribe.com - Home page for the Mashpee Wampanoag, contains links to state and national sites.

www.nativetime.com and **www.indiancountry.com** - Two on-line Native American Indian news journals.

www.quakersweat.org - a discussion of the Quaker Sweat Lodge. (added by Skip Schiel)

A few Native American Indian Authors (non-fiction and fiction):

Sherman Alexie

Joy Harjo

Adrian C. Louis

Wilma Mankiller

Simon Ortiz

Leslie Marmon Silko

Louise Erdrich

Films

The Business of Fancydancing, 2002. USA. Written and directed by Sherman Alexie (Coeur d'Alene/Spokane). With Evan Adams, Michelle St. John, Gene Tagaban. A poetic story of growth, death, and the choices that define us, *The Business of Fancydancing* reunites Spokane Reservation friends Aristotle Joseph and Seymour Polatkin sixteen years after their high school graduation. 103 min.

Smoke Signals, 1998. USA. Directed by Chris Eyre (Cheyenne/Arapaho). Screenplay by Sherman Alexie. With Adam Beach, Evan Adams, Irene Bedard. A young Native American man embarks on a life-changing journey with his childhood friend to retrieve the body of his estranged father. Eyre's directorial debut is the first major feature film to be written, directed, and co-produced by Native Americans. The screenplay is based on Sherman Alexie's novel *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. 89 min.

5th World, 2005. USA. Written and directed by Blackhorse Lowe (Navajo). With Liva'ndrea Knoki, Sheldon Silent Walker, Ernest Tsosie III. Lowe's first feature, shot in an unconventional style against the drama of the Navajo landscape, captures the intimacy of Navajo lives. The film traces the contours of a budding romance between two young adults as tribal culture shapes their bond in powerful and unexpected ways. 75 min.

Ritual Clowns, 1988. USA. Directed by Victor Masayesva, Jr. (Hopi) This experimental video considers Hopi sacred clowns from multiple perspectives. 18 min.

Incident at Oglala, The story of Leonard Peltier, a Native American, sentenced to life in prison for murder. Real story of possibly one of the most outrageous abuses of justice in U.S. history. Gr. 11+. Borrow free or purchase. Mennonite Central Committee; www.mcc.org /resources and publications. (added by Donna McDaniel)



National Day of Mourning, Plymouth MA, 1997 c.,
photo by Skip Schiel

Why Whites Think Blacks Have No Problems

~Tim Wise~

*Tim Wise is a Nashville-based writer, lecturer and antiracism activist. He can be reached at tjwise@mindspring.com. © 2005 Friends Meeting at Cambridge has been circulating many copies of his book, *White Like Me*, for self education, hopefully leading to addressing institutional racism among Friends. With his gracious permission, we are reprinting an article first posted on July 17, 2001, available now at www.alternet.org/story/11192.*

Just a few years ago [1999 c.], a public opinion poll indicated that only 6 percent of whites in the U.S. believed racism was still a "very serious" problem facing African Americans.



Tim Wise (on right) with Howard Zinn and Ernestine Washington of Community Change Inc. July 2005. photo by Skip Schiel

While larger percentages believed racism to be somewhat of a problem, only this anemic share of the white community saw it as an issue of great importance.

When you consider that twice that number—or as many as 12 percent—have told pollsters they believe Elvis Presley is still alive, it becomes apparent that delusion has taken on a whole new meaning among the dominant racial majority. Apparently, it is easier for whites to believe that a pill-popping, washed-up lounge singer faked his own death and is playing midnight gigs at some tropical resort, than to believe what black folks say they experience

every day.

It makes me think that if ignorance is indeed bliss, then my fellow whites must be among the happiest folks on the planet.

So it was no surprise to read that once again a poll has been released, indicating that whites by and large don't think racial discrimination remains a big problem, and that whites and blacks continue to view issues of racial equality far differently.

According to the recent Gallup Survey on "Black-White Relations," seven out of ten whites believe that blacks are treated equally in their communities: an optimism with which only 40 percent of blacks agree. Eight in ten whites say blacks receive equal educational opportunities, and 83 percent say blacks receive equal housing opportunities in their communities. Only a third of whites believe blacks face racial bias from police in their areas.

Despite the fact that half of all blacks say they have experienced discrimination in the past 30 days, whites persist in believing that we know their realities better than they do, and that black complaints of racism are the rantings of oversensitive racial hypochondriacs. Blacks, we seem to believe, make mountains out of molehills, for Lord knows we would never make a molehill out of a mountain!

That white perceptions of the extent of racial bias are rooted in a stupendous miasma of ignorance is made clear by a

number of salient facts. First, as will be shown below, there is the statistical evidence indicating that equal opportunity is the stuff of fiction, not documentary; and secondly, the simple truth that white perceptions of racism's salience have always been splendidly naive. Indeed, as far back as 1963, before there was a Civil Rights Act to outlaw even the most blatant racial discrimination, 60 percent of whites said that blacks were treated equally in their communities. In 1962, only 8 years after the Brown decision outlawed segregation in the nation's schools (but well before schools had actually moved to integrate their classrooms), a stunning 84 percent of whites were convinced that blacks had equal educational opportunity. In other words, white denial of the racism problem is nothing new: it was firmly entrenched even when this nation operated under a formal system of apartheid.

Of course, this ignorance of the lived realities of black people is no surprise. Rather it is in large part the result of our isolation from African Americans in daily life.

More than 80 percent of whites live in virtually all-white neighborhoods, and nearly nine in ten white suburbanites live in communities with less than 1 percent black populations. What's more, only 12 percent of whites in law school today—who by historical standards have had more opportunity to mix with people of color than any generation before them—say they had significant interaction

with blacks while growing up.

One can only expect this degree of isolation to lead to a skewed perception of what other people experience. After all, if one doesn't know many blacks, or personally witness discrimination, it is all the more likely that one will find the notion of widespread mistreatment hard to digest. Especially when one has been socialized to give more credence to what members of one's own group say, than what the racial "other" tells us is true.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that every time a black person says they have been discriminated against that they are, in fact, correct. Individuals, after all, can misperceive certain situations. But the reality of individual misperception should not lead to the widespread white belief in mass black delusion, which is virtually the only way one can read the Gallup figures.

For so many whites to believe that blacks have equal opportunity, is not only to discount a few claims of discrimination that may be without merit: rather, it is to reject the broad swath of claims that virtually every African American can bring forth from their personal mental rolodex. Fact is, if even one-tenth of the black claims of discrimination were accurate, this would translate into well over 1.75 million instances of anti-black racial bias every single month, based on survey data. Unfortunately, it is doubtful the numbers are this small.

Though the Gallup survey didn't address racial discrimination in the labor market, there is little question that when whites say blacks are treated equally, they are also assuming this to be true for the world of work. But what is the reality? According to a recent study by the Russell Sage Foundation, even though blacks search for work longer and often

more aggressively than whites, they are between 36-44 percent less likely to be hired for jobs in mostly white suburbs, even when their experience and qualifications are equal to their white counterparts. White males with a high school diploma are just as likely to have a job, and tend to earn just as much as black males with college degrees, and on average, even when age, experience, education and other relevant factors are considered, blacks average at least 10 percent less pay than similar whites.

As for education, the picture is much the same. Although formal segregation is illegal, de facto segregation remains a reality thanks to "ability tracking," which has less to do with actual ability, and more to do with racial and class bias against children of color and those from low-income families. Beginning as early as kindergarten, teachers and counselors separate students based on so-called cognitive skill levels, despite evidence that the tests used to determine these skill levels are inaccurate predictors of ability and terribly biased against students from non-dominant cultural backgrounds.

Even when black students show potential that is equal to or above that of whites, they are 40 percent less likely to be placed in advanced or accelerated classes, according to the head of the College Board. Despite evidence of ability, blacks are 2.5 times more likely to be placed in remedial or low-track classes, where they will typically be taught by the least qualified teachers, be given less challenging material to learn, and receive on average nearly 40 hours less actual instruction

annually.

So too is educational inequity fostered by unequal discipline, meted out in a racially disparate manner. Even though black and white rates of school rule infractions are roughly equal, black students are twice as likely as whites to be suspended or expelled. Blacks are half of all students suspended or expelled for weapons violations, even though self-report surveys indicate whites are just as likely to bring weapons to school, and



white males are actually twice as likely as black males to do so. Since blacks are more likely to be suspected—thanks to common stereotypes about violence and delinquency—they are the ones who get searched and caught, but this hardly means they break the rules more often.

According to studies by the Applied Research Center, the disproportionate rate of black suspensions is the result of greater punishment given for subjective infractions like "defying authority," or "attitude problems," both of which are perceived as more threatening when coming from black students than whites.

As for housing, white confidence in equal opportunity makes for nice wishful thinking, but hardly comports with reality. Virtually every study on housing bias in rental and mortgage

Press conference, Gang Peace, Roxbury, 1994 c., photo by Skip Schiel

markets for the past three decades has found evidence of substantial ongoing discrimination

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, there may be as many as 2 million instances of racial housing bias each year, and as many as half of all blacks may face discrimination when trying to rent an apartment or purchase a home.

According to the Boston Federal Reserve Bank, blacks are 56 percent more likely than whites to be rejected for a mortgage loan, even after controlling for 38 factors that could explain higher rejection rates for blacks—including issues of credit history, collateral, and income. Nationwide, mortgage loan rejection rates for the highest income group of blacks is roughly the same as the rejection rates for the lowest income whites.

Finally, white protestations that blacks receive equal treatment from police in their communities, is nothing short of laughable. A look at police prosecution of the war on drugs alone gives the lie to white claims of equal law enforcement. Though blacks are only 14 percent of illegal drug users, they are 35 percent of those arrested for possession. In many communities, including some of the ones where whites claim there is no bias in policing, blacks face arrest rates for drugs

that are five, ten, even twenty times higher than the rates for whites, despite roughly equal rates of drug usage.

Though a slim majority of whites admit that racial profiling—one clear example of unequal treatment—does happen, apparently few believe it happens where they live. Yet in state after state, studies have found a disproportionate rate of highway and surface street stops of vehicles driven by blacks, and searches of cars driven by blacks, above and beyond the rates of black traffic infractions, which otherwise might create reasonable cause.

In New York City, from 1997-1998, the NYPD's Street Crimes Unit stopped and frisked 135,000 people: 85 percent of whom were people of color. Only 4500 persons were ultimately arrested and prosecuted, meaning that over 95 percent of those harassed were innocent. Interestingly, whites who were stopped were significantly more likely to be found with drugs or other contraband, indicating that not only was this policy of racial stops and searches a biased one, but it failed the test as valid crime control on its own merits as well.

Of course, I hardly expect the facts to matter much, as an awful lot of white folks seem impervious to them. When it comes to racial realities, the levels of ignorance are so ingrained as to be almost laughable. Perhaps that's why 12

percent of whites actually say blacks are a majority of the nation's population, and why most whites believe blacks are a third of the nation's population, instead of the thirteen percent they actually represent. We seem to see black people everywhere, and apparently we see them doing quite well.

Apparently, we even see them as our buddies. 75 percent of whites in one recent poll indicated that they had multiple close black friends. Sounds great, until you realize that 75 percent of white Americans represents about 145 million people. 145 million who say they have multiple black friends, despite the fact that there are only 35 million black people to go around.

Which means one of two things: either whites are clueless about black people, friendships, or both; or black folks are mighty damned busy, running from white house to white house to white house, being our friends. In which case, we can put away all that nonsense about blacks "taking our jobs." After all, how could blacks have time to work at all, what with all the backyard barbecues they're attending at the houses of their white pals? Hell, maybe Elvis will even invite them all to Graceland when he makes his triumphant return to Memphis.

Further reading: *White Like Me*, by Tim Wise

Readers Write

about Manning Marable's "In Defense of Black Reparations," in *Freedom & Justice Crier*, #13, summer 2004

...to measure [methods and strategies of anti corporate globalization struggles] strictly in terms of skin color, as Marable seems to do, would be self-defeating, as would the adoption of US activists of his strategy that focuses on race and class rather than on the broad institutional and structural injustices that affect all Americans. As long as white Americans think that only people of color will suffer from globalization, they will hold back from any broad movement for change that seems to offer potential benefits only to minorities.

There is one major omission [in Marable's analysis] of course, and that is environment. Marable seems unaware of or indifferent to the sources, breadth and political parameters of environmental destruction, as well as to the devastating socio-economic impact that global warming will have—indeed, is already having in countries like Bangladesh and sub-Saharan Africa...

—Lorna Salzman, finding its way to our desk

Friends Equality Testimony, What Can We Do With It Today?

~Joanna Cole~

Joanna Cole, a Quaker, attends Burlington Friends Meeting, Vermont. She serves on the Committee for Racial, Social, & Economic Justice

A Religious Society of Friends "Testimony" starts with a personal religious leaning which becomes a discerned way of living out faith by a group of Friends, and ultimately, a widely recognized way for Friends. John Woolman's concern about slavery was an expression of his faith and the *Testimony of Equality*.

The Equality Testimony is not something for within our meetings only, but it naturally extends outward to how we live in our surrounding society. Doing away with the institution of slavery was not something which was agreed upon in a year. There were many years of disunity before unity was found. Woolman could not be silent, his integrity demanded him to speak up, an example of our Testimony of Integrity. And as a matter of integrity, neither can we separate our beliefs from the way we live. Convictions must be lived.

When dealing with questions of equality we must address the issues of power and oppression. In our society the people with the most *power* are the white, male, able-bodied, financially independent, heterosexuals. Why, should those in power want to share their power? Because, if we are mindful, equality demands it. People in authority automatically get to make the most decisions. Coerced people are disenfranchised people, clearly dominated. Women, if you are oppressed or dominated, you are not equal in power, which will negatively affect your self-worth. *Oppression* whether it is racial, ethnic, sexual, heterosexual, gender, age or economic class, is inequitable. A black, lesbian, Audre Lord would have had little power without having the incredible gumption of demanding it, even then it was unfairly costly. Some people speak of Quaker concerns for equality as "special interests" as if we asked for more than equality, when all we ask for is equal power. Some people live in a black cultural neighborhood but are forced to function in a white legal and financial world. That's oppression. The more we honor diversity, the

more equal we are, the richer our lives become. In our schools, at least when I was in them, the focus was white heterosexual male-value history; other people tended to be in the background, invisible, as if we didn't exist. For many church denominations homosexuality is the current hot area of struggle. Do we allow people who are homosexuals or transgender to have equal rights? Do we allow heterosexism to reign? Finding creative solutions for oppressed people remains a huge challenge.

All people have a bit of the Divine within, after all we are made in God's image, God's creation is intrinsically good. A belief in equality means all people should have equal opportunities of healthcare, education, housing, employment protection, etc.

Unfortunately, prejudice still plagues our (USA) racial and ethnic subsets of Native Americans, African-Americans, Latinas and Latinos, Asian-Americans, Arab-Americans and Jews. When we fail to recognize these people as real Americans, we show our xenophobia. How do we stop the harassment which is usually based on prejudicial hate? Helping one person at a time, although admirable, will not fix the inequitable system, just like "separate but equal" was not a reality nor was it just. Can we educate people, reducing the prejudice, based on false stereotypes?

How can our Quaker way help society come to a greater awareness of the need for Equality? Each new generation needs to re-appropriate the Equality Testimony wisdom to our current time.

If we stay attentive, we can listen carefully, request input, and be inclusive in our decision making. Are we addressing our legislatures to remove laws which we can identify as oppressive and to pass new bills which will help our movement toward true equality? Are we backing test cases in the courts to get unjust laws off the books? Are we holding our municipalities accountable for inequities that we can identify? Do you think your meeting needs to address these queries? How can we go the extra mile to change the systems of oppression?

The Committee on Racial, Social, and Economic Justice works to better understand these oppressions and bring them to your attention. How are you led to witness your faith for equality?

Profiles

~of members of the Committee on Racial, Social, & Economic Justice~

1. *What led you to serve on this committee?*
2. *What gifts do you bring to the work of this committee?*
3. *What activities are you engaged in related to the mission and themes of the RSEJ committee?*



James Varner, Co-clerk, CRSEJ

1 Being a black man and having been victimized by racism, discrimination, and injustice on a personal level all my life, I felt even worse experiencing racism and discrimination from Quakers in Quaker settings such as Meetings for Worship and Yearly Meeting Sessions. I wanted to be a part of this committee because I felt it represented a positive vehicle to address the problem of racism and discrimination of blacks within the Quaker communities and more important, to address the legacy of slavery and discrimination in the broader American community. This committee, I feel, is a way to speak truth to power about this inhumane cycle of racism and discrimination which is kept alive by the white community and white privilege.

2 I bring, as a victim of racism and discrimination, the ability to articulate to Quakers and others what it feels like to walk in the shoes of a black person and feel the lasting pain and feelings of inferiority which sap one's physical and mental energy leaving feelings of being less than human. I bring the ability to motivate committee members to want to do positive things to eliminate racism and discrimination and economic injustices visited upon the black community... I also bring the ability to attract other people of color to work with us. I bring my experience as a civil rights leader... But best of all, perhaps, I bring the gift of hope. Hope that we can work successfully to eliminate racism and discrimination in our daily lives if we commit ourselves to live as Quakers should—recognizing that there is that of God in every human being.

3 I lecture on the black experience at the University of Maine, work as a consultant on diversity and human rights for various groups around the state of Maine, founded and advise the University of Maine Human Rights Coalition, serve as a Maine Human Rights Commissioner for Gov. John Baldacci. Most importantly, I brought back to life the NAACP in Bangor, and am currently president of the Greater Bangor Area chapter.



Sam Lowe, with son, Jeremy, and friend James Rider

1 I felt led to serve on this committee when the Nominating Committee of the Yearly Meeting asked me to consider an appointment. At that time, this committee was known as the Committee on Prejudice and Poverty. I didn't know about this committee because I had not been active at the Yearly Meeting level. I must admit, I was flattered by the request, and attracted simply by the name of the committee—working on issues of prejudice and poverty sounded right to me.

2 The most important gift I bring to the work of this committee is my experience. I grew up in a Chinese-American immigrant family and spent my childhood living in the multiethnic, multiracial, predominantly African American community of South Central Los Angeles. I know about white supremacy first hand, because in my neighborhood and school I rarely saw or knew any white people—only African Americans and Asian Americans. At the same time, I know about solidarity, and about how people from across racial, ethnic, class, gender, religious and sexual orientation divides can work together and achieve progress in the face of a seemingly implacable common enemy.

3 Currently, I am doing a lot of researching and writing, both professionally and personally, on historical and practical questions of racial, social and economic justice. Personally, I am writing a biography of an eighteenth century anti-racist, antislavery white Virginia Baptist minister. Professionally, I do research, writing and consulting for nonprofit, community-based organizations in the Boston area that serve working-class immigrant communities of color..

Other members: Melody Brazo, Mary Colby, Beata Randall, Joanna Cole, Dwight Lopes, Bunny Meyer, LouAnne McDonald, Skip Schiel (profiled in Summer 2004). More profiles and photos coming.

Tips & tools—about racial, social & economic justice struggles

Articles

"A Family Tree in Every Gene," Armand Marie Leroi, March 14, 2005—
raceandgenomics.ssrc.org/Leroi/

"A Visit to Israel by a Quaker Born in Palestine," Stanley Zarowin—friendsjournal.org/contents/2003/09september/feature.htm



"Connecticut's Hidden History: How Connecticut Chained Itself to Slavery"—
www.courant.com/news/local/northeast/hc-bunceintro.artapr03,0,407447.htmlstory?coll=hc-utility-local-northeast



"Doubly Divided: The Racial Wealth Gap" Meizhu Lui—
www.blackcommentator.com/124/124_wealth.html

"Food Redlining: A Hidden Cause of Hunger," Carrie Kilman—
www.tolerance.org/news/article_print.jsp?id=1168



"The Myth of Incitement in Palestinian Textbooks," Palestinian Ministry of Education & Higher Education—
electronicintifada.net/v2/article3923.shtml



"On left anti-Semitism and the special status of Israel," by
Joel Kovel, *znet*—

www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=22&ItemID=3597



Media

ColorLines: Race - Culture - Action, an incisive periodical devoted to racism and related issues, like environment racism, www.colorlines.com



Occupation: Ordinary Life and Start Young: Youth & Youth Activism in Palestine & Israel, two slide shows about Palestine & Israel by Skip Schiel, available to meetings and other community groups, accompanied by Skip Schiel, teeksaphoto.org, contact skipschiel@gmail.com, 617-441-7756



When the Rain Returns: Toward Justice & Reconciliation in Palestine & Israel, by an AFSC international working party on Israel & Palestine—
www.afsc.org/resources/items/when_the_rain_returns.htm

Yes Magazine—
www.yesmagazine.org/



Organizations

Class Action—Building Bridges Across the Class Divide—
w.classism.org



The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights—
www.ellabakercenter.org/index.html

Gustavus Myers Center for the

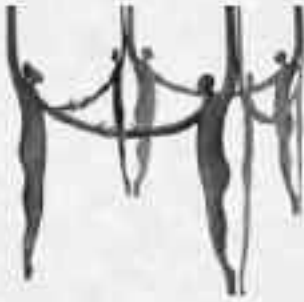
Study of Bigotry and Human Rights—
www.myerscenter.org/

Gustavus Myers Center
for the Study of Bigotry and Human Rights

Other Friends meetings

Social Justice Education, Boston, training educators & activists in anti-racism—
www.socialjusticeeducation.org, 617-524-6600

Materials from Atlanta (Georgia) Friends Meeting
about their work on racism
Contact: bertskellie@mindspirng.net



Are We Being Faithful to Our Testimony?

**First Annual North American Conference
for Racial Justice and Equality
Within the Religious Society of Friends**



SAVE THE DATES

*Friday, March 31 to
Sunday April 2, 2006*
Burlington Meeting House
Conference Center
Burlington, NJ (near Philadelphia)



Friends from across North America
are invited to worship together
and share the work that we are doing
regarding racial justice and equality,
and to develop a supportive network.

Stay Informed as Plans for this Important Conference Develop

Send us your e-mail address today at mlopes@snet.net
or write to
Maureen Lopes
25 Old Farms Road
Madison, CT 06443

We'll send you regular updates and other resources
to help insure your plans for participation will be complete.

This Conference is sponsored and hosted by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and its Ministry for
Racial Justice and Equality in the Religious Society of Friends.

Committee on Racial, Social & Economic Justice

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(Skip Schiel, 9 Sacramento St, Cambridge MA 02138-1843)

Other issues on line at <http://neym.org/PrejudiceAndPoverty/index.html>