

## Quakers for Racial Equality for AFM State of the Meeting Report, 2023

**In our journey toward the Beloved Community, Quakers for Racial Equality (QRE) has worked on building an anti-racist, multicultural Meeting where everyone's gifts are valued.** QRE has focused on communities of people in our Meeting and in the United States who have been marginalized, finding ways through resources and actions to bring all people into harmony and Beloved Community. We have made progress in education, funding to groups led by Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, and in connections with the wider community. Some themes in our work have been reparative justice for African Americans, making amends to Indigenous peoples, and addressing racism within Atlanta Friends Meeting and SAYMA. Challenges include the small number of volunteers and the need to find ways to energize Friends and break out of patterns of white supremacy culture to be a truly anti-racist multicultural spiritual community.

### **Reparative Justice for African Americans**

Quakers for Racial Equality honored Elder Friends of Color in our Meeting with a special forum with 2 African American Friends sharing their stories. In responding to Friends Journal articles on reparations, we expressed a concern for supporting local businesses owned by Black entrepreneurs. Thanks to new volunteers with more tech skills, we updated and expanded the previous AFM Black-owned businesses list to the searchable [Local Businesses Owned by Black Entrepreneurs](#) curated for AFM based on listings on [IamBlackbusiness.com](#) and tailored to areas where AFM Friends live. We encouraged Friends to support these businesses as well as efforts for reparative justice for those harmed by slavery and its aftermath.

QRE offered a forum on "Freedom to Learn Summer 2023 Takeaways and Resources," which drew parallels between backlash to Reconstruction and Civil Rights advances and the current era of anti-CRT and bans on teaching of Black history. QRE also coordinated with the Ad hoc Reparations and Right Relations committee to host the hybrid book talk on *The White Wall: How Big Business Bankrupts Black America*.

Through portions of the Social Concerns budget that QRE administers, we supported the 339 Manumissions and Beyond project, a Quaker project researching descendants of people formerly enslaved by Quakers. We also gave funds to the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) and the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC).

### **Making Amends to Indigenous people**

We have made progress in learning about making amends to Indigenous people and especially the Muscogee Creek people, since the AFM meetinghouse stands in Muscogee Creek ancestral homelands. QRE did Zoom hosting and publicity for the Ad hoc Reparations and Right Relations committee forum on "Reparative Justice & Right Relations for Indigenous peoples and African Americans" with guest speakers Craig Womack and Frank Pommersheim. Craig Womack's topic was Creek History and Creek Responsibilities, and he advised AFM on local Muscogee Creek history and current concerns.

Locally, the QRE clerk and some members have been active with the Decolonizing Decatur committee of the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights (Beacon Hill). QRE contributed to the "Art for the People" project of Decolonizing Decatur. In this project, two Afro-Indigenous artists, one of whom is Muscogee Creek, will collaborate on a project they call, "Let Us Meet on the Land" in Decatur. The project will honor Muscogee mound building, Muscogee Freedmen, the Beacon Hill community, and all building authentic community. QRE members also worked with the Decolonizing Decatur committee on the "People's History of Decatur" project. In support of efforts by Beacon Hill and some faith groups in Decatur around the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the City of Decatur, QRE sent a letter to the Mayor and City Commissioners urging the city to acknowledge its full history, including historical and ongoing harms to Indigenous people and people of African descent, and to work with DeKalb County to place a plaque honoring the Muscogee Creek people on the courthouse square in Decatur.

Knowing the “People’s History of Decatur” also helps AFM restore the histories of Indigenous people and people of African descent in narratives about our current use of the land. It is part of our process of making amends to Muscogee Creek people and to African Americans for Quakers’ role in colonization, boarding schools for Indigenous children, and Friends of European descent benefiting from oppression of Indigenous people and people of African descent.

As a step toward making amends, QRE has contributed to the Mvskoke Language Program of the Muscogee Nation, to the Muscogee Creek Indian Freedmen Band, and to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition as well as other groups. QRE has shared information from Friend Tom Kunesch on the importance of Quaker Meetings returning land to a local Indigenous group and to African Americans, with the emphasis on building a relationship first. One drawback is that although AFM has made connections with guest speakers/ activists of Muscogee Creek descent who have connections in this area, AFM has not yet formed a relationship with leadership in the Muscogee Nation.

### **QRE speakers on other topics and coordination with AFM groups**

QRE drew on its own members for speakers and also coordinated well with other groups within Meeting. QRE member Judy Lumb offered us a positive vision of “Thriving with Cultural Diversity” in her forum about Belize, in which she pointed out that all cultural groups are valued and celebrated. Bert Skellie and Erin Donahue Koehler gave an excellent presentation about Restorative Justice Advocacy and Programs in the Metro Area with information on the Georgia Justice Project, which examined restorative justice in the criminal justice system. QRE supported the Social Concerns forum on the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center and the Stop Cop City movement. In addition, QRE promoted Green Friends’ forum on Climate Change.

### **Addressing Racism in AFM and SAYMA**

At the Monthly Meeting level, QRE actively informs AFM Friends about anti-racism issues, upcoming meetings and resources, reaching a broader audience by recording forums and encouraging participation. QRE members provide a Listening Ear for Concerns about Racism every third Sunday, either in person or virtually. They also share almost weekly Virtual Literature Table information about anti-racism resources, videos, events, and workshops. QRE worked with the Committee on Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting (CURAFM) on determining which stage AFM is in on the Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Meeting. Several QRE members have discussed how to move the whole meeting beyond levels 3-4 of the Continuum to become an anti-racist multicultural spiritual home for all. Through having Zoom meetings and publicizing information via our email list and announcement sheets, QRE has been able to have outside guest speakers and reach more participants. One concern is that the same few people do most of the work in QRE. Although we have accomplished a lot with a small group of people, we wonder whether more in-person events would engage AFM Friends more fully in anti-racism work or result in more volunteers.

At the Yearly Meeting level, six of the regular QRE committee members, including the clerk, are active in the SAYMA Racial Conflict Transformation Program through small anti-racist worship/study affinity groups and larger workshops exploring racism, white supremacy, Quaker social change theory and anti-racist praxis. This has been a long-term commitment, continuing monthly from October of 2022 through September of 2023, and with some also participating as either facilitators or participants in the 2023-2024 program. The SAYMA Racial Conflict Transformation Program is helping us identify patterns of white supremacy culture within SAYMA and in AFM and speak up more.

Advancing toward Beloved Community in AFM and SAYMA will require more action steps toward racial justice as well as exchanging patterns based in white supremacy for ones in which all cultural groups have an equal voice and everyone is honored for their gifts. We welcome F/friends to join us on this journey.