

Reflections from a Friend

Asheville Friends Meeting joins many others in their concern about racial injustice and has formed a committee to address it. We are trying to discern the mission of this committee but have not yet come to unity on the particular wording. The term "white supremacy/racism" preferred by the committee has deeply hurt and offended some of us. Others recognize this term as an academic definition of an historic and ongoing system in which structural or societal racism privileges white people over others, regardless of the presence or absence of racial hatred.

In the manner of Friends, we continue to hold each other in the Light and hopefully treat each other with respect, tenderness and understanding. I invite each of us to look deep within to examine whether our attitudes, reflections & reactions are derived from Spirit or from our own unresolved issues.

The following comments are my own personal opinion and do not necessarily reflect the the thinking of the Asheville Friends Meeting:

As we continue to discern the mission statement of our Racial Justice Committee, let us for a moment or two take our thoughts to a less personal level and try to see the issue as a more systemic reality.

Let's pretend for now we're from Mars or some other planet and we're looking at the history of planet earth from a few hundred years ago. We see the North American continent with many people of darker skin living and working, raising families and taking care of themselves and their part of Earth. We also see the European continent with white skinned people doing some of the same actions.

One day, some of these light-skinned people decide to go on an adventure in hopes of gaining more land and wealth. They get in ships and sail away to the American continent. When they get to this far-away place, they see that the people have a different way of doing things and a different way of being. The light-skinned folks don't particularly like these other ways and they tell the darker-skinned people we have a better way. We will take this land and do things our way so you'll have a good life. We know better than you what's best

for you.

Of course, the dark-skinned ones don't like this and there is much conflict. But the light skins set up laws, systems and institutions to be sure they are in charge and have power over the dark skins. As we keep looking at this history, we see the light skins continue to be in charge and they suppress the dark skins so they can maintain their power over them. The light skins say we have more knowledge and expertise than you so our way is superior to yours. We'll build the best of all worlds here and for your own good, you'll help us do things our way.

Now as an outsider from another planet, wouldn't we say this scenario illustrates how the light skinned (white) people have supremacy over people of color? Today we can't change any of this history but can't we at least acknowledge that our systems, institutions and culture elevate white people to a supreme position? It doesn't necessarily mean a particular individual has supremacist attitudes but that our white skin automatically puts us at a higher level than dark-skinned folks. My understanding is that our Racial Justice Ministry uses the term "white supremacy" to name and acknowledge this fact.

~Patricia M. Johnson