

Aiming for Justice: Race Reparations and Right Paths

An online workshop with K. Melchor Quick Hall

Workshop History:

This is Melchor Hall's third year hosting a reparations workshop with Pendle Hill. Each year has been unique. In the first year, course themes included the distinction between justice-oriented giving and philanthropy, the opportunity costs of retirement savings, and the relationship between inheritance and the racial wealth gap. At the end of the first workshop, while still on the Pendle Hill campus, participants asked that Melchor Hall provide a workshop the subsequent year. Her condition was that she would offer a second workshop only if the next year's participants committed \$10,000 to race-based redistribution.

After receiving a combined \$10,000 commitment from participants, the second year of the workshop happened. It explored Quaker connections to the prison industrial complex, and specifically the link to solitary confinement, as a way to examine how past actions might require current-day repair. Participants talked about their histories in order to trace the racialized and gendered boundaries of their privilege. Through this process, they identified how families, schools, institutions, and organizations contributed to creating structures of opportunity. Then, they reached out to people outside of these structures or within the organizations in ways that would broaden the racial diversity of the people with access to the kinds of privilege that were central to the participants' sense of identity and accomplishment.

In spite of the fact that this is the third year of the reparations workshop, it would be a mistake to think of the series as a linear progression. New people should feel welcome to participate without any knowledge of the content of previous workshops. Often, linear narratives re-make messy realities into neat chronologies. If searching for such a grand narrative, one could describe the first year as a focusing on the distinction between charity and justice, year two as making the critical step of shifting resources, and year three as focusing on relinquishing power. In particular, last year highlighted the careful attention and research that white inheritors of unearned wealth will put into finding appropriate recipients for their offerings. Of course, there was no careful deliberation in the initial assignment of this wealth privilege; it was only an accident of birth into a particular (white) family.

At the end of the second workshop, there were requests to continue the workshop at Pendle and expand to a second location, Woolman Hill Quaker Retreat Center. Of course, no one could have imagined at the time the series of events that would shape the context for this year's workshop. Programming at both locations has been reduced and restricted, and many health experts are anticipating a surge in coronavirus cases this winter. Thus, it is in the midst of a global health pandemic, economic crisis, and racial uprising that this third workshop is calling on US-based white inheritors of wealth to commit money for redistribution. This year, the money committed will be split between Black residents of two neighborhood blocks that have been impacted by gentrification. One block is in South Media, PA, minutes away from Pendle

Hill Quaker Retreat Center. The second block in is Northwest Washington, DC, where the facilitator spent her early years of life.

During the second year of the workshop, Melchor Hall did not stay on the Pendle Hill campus. Instead, she stayed with a friend, singer-songwriter and vocal coach Danie Ocean. It was over a week of conversations that Melchor Hall and Danie Ocean realized that something was sorely missing from the workshop series. While white participants came together and benefitted tremendously from the connections made with one another and access to critical social justice scholarship, the experiences of recipients were isolated. The beneficiaries of the wealth redistribution did not have a collective experience of justice. Hall and Ocean committed to modifying the program in a way that that would impact some group of Black people in as profound a manner as the white participants who had attended the workshops. After a week of conversations, they decided to that the best way to do this was by connecting to longtime Black residents of neighborhood blocks.

Songwriter Danie Ocean came up with the phrase “legacy residents” to describe these longtime residents who have lived in the same house for decades, sometimes raising their children and visiting with grandchildren in the home. Hall and Ocean realized that they were both born into neighborhood blocks with legacy Black residents who should be part of the work being done in these workshops. That is how this year’s design was born, in a way that stands to provide collective healing and repair to legacy Black residents. Programming will be provided for legacy Black residents of gentrified (or gentrifying) neighborhoods during the final two weeks of the month-long workshop, and will feature Jessica Gordon Nembhard’s *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*.

Aiming for Justice intends to spark a grassroots reparations movement that understands racial justice as important spiritual work. Amidst national conversations about individual transfers and national policies, this program is pitched at the level of supporting small groups of white inheritors of wealth coming together to support Black residents from the same neighborhood. To be clear, this is not advocated as *the solution*, but rather *a solution* that should be combined with many others as a way to begin repairing the tremendous injury of white supremacist violence (in its many forms) to our collective humanity.