

Aiming for Justice: Race Reparations and Right Paths

An online workshop with K. Melchor Quick Hall

Workshop History:

This is Melchor Hall's fourth 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.

At the end of the second workshop, there were requests to continue the workshop at Pendle Hill 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 the third year's workshop. In the midst of a global health pandemic, economic crisis, and racial uprising, the third workshop met virtually through Pendle Hill. Readings included Carol Anderson's *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*. The third year called on US-based white inheritors of wealth to collectively commit \$20,000 for redistribution to legacy Black residents of two neighborhood blocks that had been impacted by gentrification. One block was in South Media, PA, minutes away from Pendle Hill Quaker Retreat Center. The second block was in Northwest Washington, DC, where the facilitator spent her early years of life.

In spite of the fact that this is the fourth 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 a somewhat linear 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, year three as focusing on relinquishing power, and year four as making the case for the importance of a national response, spearheaded by white inheritors of wealth. Previous years highlighted the careful attention and research that white inheritors of unearned wealth put into finding appropriate, often local 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.

This year's workshop stands alone in that it will be facilitated by prior workshop participants, with the workshop's creator providing critical support. 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 groups of white inheritors of wealth, inspired by moral and spiritual callings, coming together to create programs of repair at the national level. 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.