

Report to the NC Fellowship of Friends Annual Gathering on August 21, 2021

At last year's Annual Gathering, Margaret Rowlett and Vicki McCreedy of First Friends Meeting gave a presentation on "Race, Racism, and Antiracism Work." Ten participants who responded to a survey afterwards expressed an interest in NCFF sponsoring additional programming on the topic. So starting in September, NCFF antiracism dialogues were held monthly through May, except in December, with the following goal: "Through regular discussions, readings, and sharing, we seek to educate ourselves about the impact of racism in our lives with the goal of transforming our Meetings and our larger communities so we can live out Friends' testimony of equality in a racist world."

Our first meeting centered on the topic of "Where Can We Start as We Engage in Antiracism Work?" We reviewed important history of this country that we did not learn growing up, including the Black Codes of the post-slavery era, lynching, the Wilmington Massacre, and the Black Wall Street Massacre. We also talked with the group about the reasons it can be so hard for white people to talk about race.

At our October meeting, we looked at systemic racism and lessons from the book by Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. We examined the causes of residential segregation and how tactics that separated people by race, like redlining, are still having a horribly negative impact to this day. In November, we discussed ideas from the book by Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, including the need for constant confession in this work.

In the spring we focused on the book *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson for three meetings. As the author said in an interview on NPR, "Caste focuses in on the infrastructure of our divisions and the rankings, whereas race is the metric that's used to determine one's place in that." Our discussions included identifying elements of the caste system in Quaker history, referencing the book *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice* by Donna McDaniel and Vanessa Julye.

Our final session was on May 25, the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's death, when we had a guest speaker join us, Bob Gordh, brother of Rudy Gordh, who shared with us why reparations are needed in the US. We also worshipped together and reflected on the antiracist power of lament.

At the end of our sessions, we asked for feedback from participants using an online survey. Comments included the following: "I loved the format and how it kept things moving. We learned from the presentations and from each other in the breakout rooms and in the whole group. I liked being on Zoom where we could share videos and music." Everyone who responded plans to participate again in the fall of 2021. There's definite interest in having more book discussions and more guest speakers.

Participants were mainly from New Garden, Jamestown, and First Friends Meetings. Leadership was provided by Margaret Rowlett, Vicki McCreedy, Mary Nelle Smith, CH Holcombe, and Kate Seel.

At this time, we ask that NCFF establish an Antiracism Working Group or officially recognize our dialogue group as an ongoing working group that seeks at least one representative from each monthly meeting of NCFF.