

Race, love and justice

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About 40 years ago and about 10 miles from here, two radio astronomers had a problem. They had built a large radio receiver to track signals from the Telstar satellite, but they kept receiving static and noise that hid the very faint signal they sought. So they began to systematically eliminate all sources of noise, screening out radar and radio waves, and supercooling their detector to eliminate the effects of heat. They even evicted a pair of pigeons who had nested in the astronomers' 20 foot horn antenna.

Still, the noise persisted. Even more puzzling, it came from every point of the sky in seemingly equal amounts. Eventually the astronomers realized they were looking at the background radiation of the universe itself. This low intensity field was the remnant of the Big Bang in which the universe was created around 13.7 billion years ago. In 1978 Dr. Penzias and Dr. Wilson receive a Nobel Prize for their discovery.

The super intense burst of energy released in the Big Bang slowly diffused and cooled over time. Today, even as we sit here 13.7 billion years later, its remnant surrounds us, immerses us, in a field of radiation with an ambient temperature a few degrees above absolute zero.

In 1492 there was another big bang, only this occurred in the social world. Columbus opened the way for European colonization of the Americas, setting in motion events that continue today. Europeans and their diaspora became the supreme rulers of the world. Like the Big Bang, it was all there from the start. Conquest, slavery, disease, genocide, sexual and cultural exploitation, and the single-minded imposition of the conqueror's will and values.

Columbus reaped the profits of his efforts, and controlled the activity of the Spanish in the Caribbean. On his watch the native islanders were worked to death in mines, enslaved and sold to Europe, and hunted down like animals, torn apart by Spanish war dogs, and sometimes taken alive for dog food. Men and women committed suicide, sometimes in mass, and women killed their babies to keep them from enslavement. From the start Columbus rewarded his men with native women to rape. In 1500 he wrote of the local

sex trade that “there are plenty of dealers who go about looking for girls; those from nine to ten are now in demand.”

In time this European trajectory of domination came to be known as white supremacy. It expanded through the Americas, through Asia, and through Africa, encompassing the entire social universe of humankind. It reshaped the values and permeated the consciousness of both conqueror and conquered, so that well before our present time, none but the smallest most remote, most isolated fraction of humankind has been unaffected.

Today our world is permanently reshaped, impossibly and irreversibly different from a mere half millennium ago. It’s as if the world has witnessed the passage of massive thunderstorms, and in their wake we are left surrounded by a fog that penetrates every aspect of our experience. We live in a fog of white supremacy. This fog is so prevalent and pervasive that it often passes for the natural order of things. Yet, it’s the only world we know. And living forever in this fog, we imagine our vision is clear.

Friends, who are we? And where do we locate ourselves? We have a marvelous light to hold before the world. Yet sometimes in a fog, the brightest light serves only to blind those who bring it forth and they are left to stumble and feel their way about. I have no certain answers for you tonight. The many opinions we have among Friends in this body each speak a measure of truth.

But having made a study of the fog within our midst, tonight I hope to offer some facts, some opinions, and some notions **about race, love and justice**. I’ll do much of that by looking at history, and some stories, all based in fact. And then I’ll try to bring some focus to our present time in light of our history.

For the next few minutes, I’d like you take a journey with me. We’re going to move along a timeline. The timeline begins October 12, 1492. That was 514 years, 5 months and 20 days ago. What has taken place during those 514 years AC? “AC,” that stands for “After Columbus.” It’s just a little device I plan to use for the timeline, so we can keep track of relative time periods. So, anyway, let’s begin our journey.

Columbus, we heard, allowed the sexual exploitation of children on his watch. He was familiar with the African slave trade and personally enslaved and sold to Europeans more than 5,000 Indians. The Spanish crown was reluctant to endorse this trade, but the views of Columbus gradually prevailed.

By 24 AC, of every 1000 islanders on the island of Hispaniola before Columbus set up shop, only 4 were left alive.

By 50 AC the native population of Hispaniola had gone from a level of 1 million souls to extinction. Their place was taken by enslaved Africans. Spanish slavery spread throughout the Caribbean into Central and South America.

In 115 AC (after Columbus) the English established Jamestown. They brought no slaves and had no plans to introduce slavery. No Englishperson used the term “white” as a racial reference. “White” meant “pure.” It was a term that might apply to any confirmed and devout Christian, regardless of skin color. See, for instance, the Book of Daniel, Chapter 12 Verse 10 in the King James Version of the Bible for an example of this usage. The King James Bible, of course, was named after the same King James as was Jamestown.

In 128 AC twenty black people arrived in Jamestown. They were the first people of African heritage to arrive in the English colonies. They were purchased, but quite likely indentured and not enslaved.

The next year, in 129 AC, Pilgrims arrived in New England.

In 184 AC the Virginia colony suffered the most serious rebellion of any English colony in America. A powerful elite had grown in Virginian soil, removed from old world sensibilities of moderation. These elite owned all the productive land, and forced the populace to work under brutal conditions. The oppressed, which included both African and English, overthrew the government and burned the capital.

Thirty years later, in 215 AC, the elite remained in control. They had suppressed the rebellion after a year, and then began to divide African and English poor. Through a series of changes to law and customary practice, the elite enslaved Africans, and gave the poor English advantages over Africans they previously had not held. The elite turned to racial slavery as a source of labor, so that from the point of the rebellion until 50 years later, the proportion of black people in the labor force went from 5% to 50%. It was during this time that the word “white” was first used in law to refer to someone by race.

In 284 AC the United States was formed with the Declaration of Independence. We are now more than halfway along our journey. Until this era, the humanity of black and native American people was known and accepted by much of the English and European world, so that a Christian concern was always afoot to save the souls of the heathen. But during the War of Independence, slogans such as “Rights of Man” and the famous “All men are created equal” complicated the lives of slaveholders and the American public.

By 315 AC European and European American science stepped forward with an answer. European Americans were told by our scientists that people of color were not human. The scientists created classifications, Caucasians and hierarchies, and posited the independent genesis of each race, contrary to earlier Christian doctrine. They portrayed race mixing as unnatural and degenerate, and producing defective beings.

The law followed science and on the eve of the Civil War, in 367 AC, the US Supreme Court said Africans were not entitled to any human rights.

The Civil War ended in 373 and slavery was made illegal through the Thirteenth Amendment, except for one instance. (There's a loophole, which I'll touch on later.)

We've traveled almost three-fourths of our timeline already, 73 percent of the way, to be precise. There was an interlude during Reconstruction at which time the forces for equality, love and justice struggled to create a clear space in the surrounding smoke and haze of white supremacy.

But the haze prevailed. It showed its organized form shortly after the withdrawal of Federal troops from the South. Black citizens of the South fled in mass and were met by armed white resistance using terrorism to turn them back. Many managed to run the gauntlet, but more were turned back.

White supremacy, under the new name of Jim Crow became dominant from around 404 AC with the Plessey v. Ferguson decision legalizing "separate but equal." In 422 AC Woodrow Wilson made segregation official policy of the US government.

In 473 AC modern Civil Rights legislation was passed. At this point we have come 92 percent of our journey, and we have now entered the age of colorblindness. White supremacy has changed several times in the past. Will it take a new form for a modern age?

Finally let's take the last 8% of our journey. Today is 514 AC, 42 years after modern Civil Rights legislation, and that's good. That's a good thing. The massive thunderstorms of the past have quieted.

But there is still a fog, a pervasive remnant of white supremacy that surrounds us, out there, and even here, in this room. It has thinned over time, but it persists. On occasion a force, such as Hurricane Katrina, blows the fog away and we see clearly for a moment, but it always returns. Even now we must speak to one another through the haze.

That's a timeline. We could make others, of course. This was simply a timeline of white supremacy. Eventually it will end. And that's a good thing, too. But if we have an interest in working to undo white supremacy, then we need to be prepared to continue our work through our life times.

Love and justice

Martin Luther King spoke of the Beloved Community. It's a concept that feels right. The Beloved Community. It gives us a vision of a world in which love and justice prevail, and race no longer makes a difference in how we experience each. Where we have our heritage and our future as one community and we share and nurture our common interests and resources. Where marriage and family formation can grow along interracial lines with unremarked acceptance. Where friendship can withstand harsh truths of the past.

The young people in SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, lived within a sense of the Beloved Community. They reached for it, and gave their hearts to its embrace. I wasn't part of SNCC, or the struggle for equal rights in the 1960s south. But I have learned a little from their example.

I believe the Beloved Community calls to us. By that, I mean it calls to a great many of us in society at large, and that in the Society of Friends, the notion of living in Beloved Community might have near universal acceptance.

But in our actual lives, it seems to be a difficult place to find. Instead, we find ourselves, more often than not, faced with two communities, which reflect difference across a history of racial injustice and white supremacy.

So, like Dr. King, we haven't gotten there yet. But I believe we can agree on wanting to get there. I believe Friends will find Spirit in work that leads us closer to the Beloved Community.

In my opinion, work undertaken to that end must discern and embrace two foundations of community. We might also call them pillars, to denote how central they are. They can stand alone, but when they do, no community can endure. Together they flow out of the concept of Beloved Community itself, and these words, these concepts, these pillars of community are **love and justice**.

A few years ago I read a history book. The author made an interesting observation, which I'll have to paraphrase because I can't find the source.

He said from time immemorial the oppressor has spoken of love and the oppressed have spoken of justice.

I had to think about that for a while, but I believe it's true. So often privilege and oppression cut across family lines. Consider gender or sexual orientation, for instance. And if they do not cut across families, privilege and oppression certainly cut across communities, as in the case of race and class. The oppressed, by definition, do not receive justice. When they ask for it, the privileged ask them why they are being disloyal family members, or disrupting the harmony of the community, when in fact we should love one another.

Love and justice are themes that interweave in a society that has a system of privilege in place. But they don't occur together for all people, so in fact not one, but two communities exist, each with its separate concerns for love and justice. Bringing these communities together means finding a common understanding of love and justice. So we have to ask, how might love and justice look in the Beloved Community?

I don't have the ultimate answer to that, but I'd like to explore the concepts a little. Let me begin with love.

Love

I used to think that interracial love was something modern, and that history would show only its absence. Now love can have many dimensions. It can be filial, neighborly, sisterly and brotherly, romantic, communal, or spiritual in nature.

Just as an aside, there is, out there in the mainstream, a notion of interracial love as "jungle fever" or based in social rebellion, or a form of sexual perfidy. I invite you to step away from a sensationalist view, and understand interracial love as a normal experience that is embraced in the Beloved Community.

Well, anyway, I didn't see any of that in my history books. So I concluded that interracial love was a concept that folks back then had no consideration for, and that no examples could be found.

Boy, was I ever wrong.

If hope springs eternal, so too does love. Let me offer some examples from the past. These stories come from my studies. I don't know any of the people from family history, for instance. But they are real people. As I tell the stories, I ask that Friends hold each of the people, or their memory, in the Light.

An example of brotherly love :

- The African American historian James Hugo Johnston said of an event in 1802
 "The case of James Allen, a Methodist, appears to offer the example of a white man who gave his life to make possible the escape of a slave. In this instance Holloway's Charles, with the aid of Allen, made his escape from his master. Allen was taken into the woods to be whipped until he revealed the location of the missing Negro. [Allen] refused to speak and the testimony sent to the governor reveals the harrowing details of his torture and death."

A father's love for his daughter:

- In 1875 in Harrisonburg, VA, John Robert Jones, a retired general in the Confederate army, had a daughter by his maid, Melinda Rice. He later set up Melinda in her own household until her untimely death, and saw their daughter Mary was educated through college. He publicly claimed Mary as his child, leading to his name being virtually erased from local history.

Romantic love:

- The transition from slavery following the Civil War gives us a window into some lives. A. H. Foster, an European American man, in Louisiana in the late 1840s, held several people in slavery. He loved one, named Leah, and wanted to marry her. He emancipated Leah and several of her children, moved them to Ohio, and provided for them. Later he moved his family to Texas where they stayed together until his death two years following the Civil War. Cornelia Hart, who had been held as a slave by E.C. Hart, a white man, told a Louisiana court in 1869 that she and E.C. had been married, and that she and their children deserved to receive his estate. The court admitted that the evidence was overwhelming that E.C. loved his family. Cornelia testified to a marriage ceremony she and E.C. held in 1867 and the court accepted her account. A.P. Dickerson lived openly with Ann and their children in Mississippi from 1855 through 1871.
- In August 1681, Eleanor Butler, a white woman, married Negro Charles, an enslaved man, with the blessing of the Catholic church. By prevailing law in Maryland, Eleanor was held in servitude during Charles' life, which lasted a great while, and their children were enslaved forever. The record shows their great grand children continued as slaves. In the face of the same penalties, other interracial marriages were recorded, including that of Elizabeth Shorter with Little Robin and Mary Fisher with Dick.

Community love:

- From around 1660 to 1750 German Lutherans in the area of Albany, New York accepted black people into membership and allowed enslaved and free black people to marry freely. The Lutherans accepted interracial marriage as well. For example, in 1741 James Elsworth, an Englishman, married Mary Jorga, a free black woman.
- In July 1863 draft riots shook New York City. Irish rioters targeted African-Americans and many were lynched and mutilated. But in the poorest area of the city, the 5-points area, Irish and African Americans

joined in common defense of lives and property. One hundred people lost their lives in the riot throughout the city, most of them black. But in 5-points, no black person died.

- In 1796, what is now Plainfield Meeting, my own meeting, considered Cynthia Miers for membership. She was described as a mulatto woman. Her case was taken through Shrewsbury Quarter to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, where it was decided that color could not stand in the way of membership in the Religious Society of Friends. And so her membership was approved.

Spiritual love:

- In Virginia during the Great Awakening in the second half of the 18th century, several Baptist and Methodist churches were founded by mixed-race groups, including both slaveholder and the people held as slaves. Interaction among members was surprisingly egalitarian, given the congregations' existence in the midst of a slavery system.

There is love to be found in each of these stories. These are stories of people who went against the grain. While their actions were unusual, they were not entirely uncommon. Several hundred similar examples can be found.

There has been interracial love in the past, and in some times and in some places the strength and quality of interracial friendship has been very high. Higher than anything we see, on average, today.

But here's my key point.

There was love to be found, but there wasn't justice. Love might conquer many things but injustice has always remained as a backdrop to interracial love and relationship. The Lutheran community outside Albany eventually learned to practice segregation in marriage. The children of white women in Maryland remained enslaved through several generations. The ex-slaveholder's black family had to fight for their inheritance in court. The brethren of many Baptist congregations accepted the system of slavery. In every instance the relationship is constrained by an unjust society.

Did Melinda Rice have the freedom to turn away the sexual advances of her employer, General Jones, that led to the birth of their daughter, Mary? Did she feel a sense of love, or did she simply tolerate a situation that held promise for her daughter? We don't know. The record doesn't say, and the system of white supremacy makes both interpretations possible.

The many past examples of interracial love are like so many islands in the broader haze of white supremacy. They are isolated pockets where love existed but injustice hovered on the edge, ready to enter upon any change.

Justice

Let's talk about justice.

If a community is to be immersed in love, it must also be immersed in justice.

The notion of justice I am using is that of making things right. So I don't want Friends to hear it as retribution, revenge, or excessive punishment. In fact, when I use the term "justice," I pretty much mean it in the way Friends would have justice be. I'm sure there are several individual definitions, but they would certainly center around a sense of respect for the material and spiritual condition of every person involved.

Surely you've heard the protest chant: "No justice, no peace." Friends know this, and so over many generations we have carried a sense of justice into our peace work. Many Friends work to make the misnamed criminal justice system more truly just. These and other Friends often promote the approach of restorative justice. And Friends remember and sympathize with injustices early Friends suffered.

So we know justice, and I believe we can trust our own sense of what justice is, and allow for continuing revelation and worship to be our guide.

But this work is sometimes made difficult by what I've been calling the fog of white supremacy.

Here is an example of how the fog works.

Imagine you saw the rural, largely white counties of your state facing economic decline from loss of agricultural and small manufacturing jobs.

Imagine, too, that you find a way to offset this loss by creating an economic sector heavily invested in constructing large 24-hour residential institutions. Over the course of the next 30 years the continued construction, and the social and maintenance needs of the institutions create a viable employment market. Local citizens with a high school education can get a steady job with benefits. Greater opportunities are available to those pursuing more education. Local merchants and professionals can find customers with disposable income.

The 24-hour residential institutions themselves have little impact on the region's environment, unlike factories, or even agribusiness. Better yet, all the people who come to live in your institution then have it registered as their place of residence, and you get another congressional seat when re-districting takes place. Best of all, the state government pays for everything. Sounds too good to be true.

The only problem is, you have to get the people to reside in the institutions. You need a lot of people, and you need a continuous supply. You need a reason for uprooting people

from their own homes and placing them far away. The conditions in the 24-hour institution are not pleasant. The dollars pay salaries and benefits, but they don't buy much in the way of luxury for the residents.

We're talking about prisons, of course.

In the 1950s and 1960s we witnessed highway building on a grand scale. Architects of the elite carved high speed access roads from central cities to the suburbs, literally blasting historic neighborhoods of color apart and destroying local economies. The Cross Bronx Expressway is a local example.

In more recent times, we've witnessed a social engineering feat just as devastating. We now have a pipeline from the inner cities to the rural counties in many states. The pipeline carries people of color to prison, where they do their time and are released to trickle back, and maybe get collected in the pipeline again. Even the bottleneck in the pipeline, the courts, have been made more efficient through the plea bargaining system.

We now spend more on prisons than on education. As Friends probably know, many of those in prison are non-violent offenders who need treatment and rehabilitation, not incarceration. Local community-based programs of rehabilitation and restorative justice can serve society's needs in a more humane and cost effective way. Why doesn't that happen?

Earlier I mentioned a loophole in the 13th amendment. Slavery is not illegal in all cases in the United States. I thank Mahesh Thomas for pointing this out to me. The 13th Amendment says, and I quote:

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

That's the complete wording.

Let's consider our prison population. These are the same people who have been exempted from the 13th Amendment protection against being enslaved. I would say that they are citizens, in that they are not legally owned in the way slaves used to be. Also, they are probably the people with fewest resources, in other words, the people easiest to move into the pipeline without wholesale resistance. Their place in the pipeline justifies the entire system, so that while their personhood is not significant, their economic value is high. They are plentiful. There's more where they come from. They are only kept by the system for a term, and usually not for life. Their lives are cheap, and they have few protections. They can be anybody available, through generally they are people of color and poor white people.

I just described a set of conditions where:

- Legal ownership is avoided.
- There is a very low purchase cost
- And very high profits
- There is a surplus of potential inmates
- Who are held for limited terms.
- They essentially are disposable
- And ethnic differences not important

These are the defining characteristics of new slavery according to Kevin Bales in his book *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*. Bales didn't discuss the United States, per se, in his book. But it applies to us as well as it does to Thailand, Brazil or Pakistan.

The one condition of the new slavery that may not be clear is that ethnic differences are not important. Bales emphasizes that it is wealth and power, or lack thereof, that decides who can enslave whom. In many countries, this means people of similar ethnic backgrounds but different class status, may enslave, or be enslaved by each other. In the United States, living in the still present fog of white supremacy, people of color are often the most vulnerable, and poor urban communities of color are clearly at risk. Poor whites are also vulnerable and can just as easily get caught up in the system, though in small ways their whiteness mitigates against the harshest treatment by the system.

So, it is and it isn't color. The new slavery doesn't care on the one hand, but the history of white supremacy makes communities of color vulnerable and so they bear the brunt of a runaway prison system. This system, by the way, is paid for by the taxpayers. In fact, when you consider that we are pretty much all taxpayers, then we are all, in effect, slave owners, or at least traffickers. Friends, we understand the relationship between paying taxes and supporting immoral government activities, so this, I feel, is something we have to think about seriously.

How could all this happen? White supremacy makes this possible. Nothing else could. And that's only one example.

I could talk about more examples, but that would become dreary. On top of that, whatever your focus of social concerns, you probably have to skills to look at it through the fog of white supremacy if you begin to see the fog itself. You can look at housing, health care, the intergenerational transfer of wealth, education, and the employment market, and find similar ways in which the history and heritage of the US has carried a system of white supremacy into our present time. Not the old style night riders, for the most part, but more a diffuse method of operation by institutions and the mainstream culture that keeps existing privilege intact.

We could cover that ground, but I leave that to you. No, what I want to speak to tonight is a framework for understanding the work at hand. I believe that work is to understand how

we can learn to weave interracial love and racial justice together, inseparably, so that we might move toward the Beloved Community.

I believe this is a lifetime work. That's a simple belief, but consider some things. We have the task of seeing and naming white supremacy in our own time. This has never been easy, but then too, it has never been far away as a task in interracial settings. Recall the mixed congregations of Baptists and Methodists in 18th century Virginia. When these congregations began, in the 1750s, they seemed to simply accept slavery as a way of life. But after 30 or 40 years of interracial community, several congregations came to name slavery as a sin. It takes time to create interracial love and community. Ultimately that depends on a growing understanding of racial justice as well.

Completely undoing the work of 514 years of white supremacy may take another century or two at least. That's my guess for the amount of time it will take for all the fog to dissipate. So if you take an interest in racial justice, prepare to hold a long view on things. But recall, too, that a lifetime for any of us may last only another moment, and the time to do one's work is now.

I need to say something about European American Quakers, whom I've often had an opportunity to observe in meetings and fellowship and on many other occasions. And so I would like to direct some comments to European American Friends.

I think we feel racial hurts. By that, I mean we have negative feelings about living in a system of white supremacy and these feelings bear upon our sense of self, and community, and our spiritual condition. We all have different ways of bearing this burden. I would call it the burden of the privileged.

Today we have a modern version of white supremacy, and modern slavery. We also have a modern version of privilege, in which a person doesn't get to pick his or her group. I suppose most of us are citizens of the United States. We enjoy privileges in terms of the resources we have available compared to most of the world. No one asked us if that was what we want, and among Friends there are some, at least, who would prefer a more level world economy.

Now, whenever I talk about privilege, I have to admit to several privileged statuses, as a straight, white male, who is Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, here since 1635, American. I can't identify a single oppressed status in my social standing. Admittedly I am part of an interracial family, and that gives me a close perspective on how racial injustice can operate. But I've had a lot of opportunity to reflect on what it means to be privileged as well. And I have to say, very few of us, across many types of privilege, ever feel we are privileged in that particular way. Men, we don't feel it. Straight people, we don't feel it. Protestants, as such, we don't feel it. And I have no idea what Anglo-Saxons feel, per se,

but we probably don't feel our privilege either. Americans at large, as well, don't feel they are privileged. But we are. And I think that's part of how modern privilege operates.

When we become aware of privilege, then we start to bear the burden of that privilege. And I think that's a heavier burden than most people want to admit.

Finally, among European Americans, and not just Quakers, who are liberal in their view of race relations, I've notice an interesting tendency, and it goes like this: When the talk is about justice, then European Americans do not talk about race. And when the talk is about race, then European Americans do not talk about justice. And when people of color raise the matter of racial justice, European Americans invariably respond with a call for love, more love, and only love.

I think we need to go beyond that a little and begin to grapple with justice. If community is our goal. If we are willing to see the fog, to name it, and look through it. If we wish to set a better example for others and ourselves. If we are to do what it takes to bring forth the Beloved Community.

So I offer these thoughts on race, love and justice.

Friends, I will leave you with two queries.

Query 1. How can European American Friends take Quaker tools for justice and, as a privileged group in a fading but present system of white supremacy, join with Friends of color in applying those tools, so that justice is shared within our community?

Query 2. How might we Friends better love one another in this work?