

What was it like, going to WPC?

“A wonderful, moving, eye-opening, incredible experience. Hearing the speakers and spending time with so many other young activists made me realize that this social justice work, specifically racial justice, is not just something that I SHOULD do but something that I NEED to do in my heart and soul and body. I have been trying to bring that realization home with me and to my school, trying to make all the difference I can and educate people about white privilege and white supremacy. I’m so lucky to have had the opportunity to go to the conference”

“How can/do we in our FMC community spiritually nurture each other and lovingly hold one another accountable as we engage in racial justice and anti-oppression work? What will help me step into the uncomfortable spaces necessary to grow on my journey of learning about and working towards racial justice? How/can I seek out the support I need?”

“Before going, I’d worried about feeling overwhelmed by guilt at my class and race privileges. I asked a few friends back home to hold me in the Light for ‘buoyancy and learning,’ the perfect combination. I stayed mostly buoyant and I did learn. Being with other FMC folks helped. Also, and most important, the WPC approach is not to ‘call people out’ on our unearned privilege, but to ‘call people in’ to working together for awareness and change. So, how do we want to call each other in?”

“A wonderfully-run, uplifting, and challenging conference, from the plenaries to the workshops with small group work which helped facilitate learning in a tangible way. The sense of ‘it’s okay to make mistakes’ made for safe sharing about our own

‘isms’—particularly racism. I was challenged again to be aware of all the ways I unconsciously walk around with my privilege, what I take for granted on a daily basis. I want to think more about how to address systemic racism with others. I particularly appreciated the workshop on “Being Spiritual but Not Religious” which had many Quakers in attendance. Thanks to FMC and the Beneficial Cycle for helping make it possible for so many of us to attend.”

“In *Waking Up White*, Debby Irving writes of ‘the feeling of being part of a movement based on awareness, honesty, collaboration, and healing [that] has brought with it [a] life-affirming sense of connectedness’—that describes my experience at the WPC. I gained a renewed commitment to learn and practice more of the multicultural tools in anti-racism work.”

“I attended Debby Irving’s workshop, ‘I’m a Good Person—Isn’t That Enough?’ Like her, I was raised in a white suburban middle-class family. I grew up in a small three-bedroom ranch house near Kansas City. The families in my neighborhood were very similar: most of the men had been in the armed forces, gone to college, and recently bought their first houses. All the families were white. My parents worked hard and lived frugally to obtain their prosperity. This was the natural progression: if you grew up in poverty as my mother had, you could make a better life for yourself and your kids by working hard and getting a good education. It was all up to you.

“In the workshop and Irving’s book, I learned that although my parents did deserve the rewards of their hard work, many other people who had worked just as hard and lived just as frugally did not reap those rewards, and it was not a matter of

chance. My parents' upward mobility had a big boost not shared by people of color. The GI bill made it possible for millions of American ex-servicemen of my father's generation to go to college or graduate school. My dad got a master's degree on the GI bill. But only 4% of the one million returning black GIs received these educational benefits. When my parents bought their first home, they got a GI loan. Again, African Americans didn't share this opportunity. Federal Housing Authority policies stipulated that loans were available only for "good" housing stock; by definition a home in a black neighborhood was not a good investment and therefore not qualified for a GI loan. The GI bill distributed 120 billion dollars; 98% of the loans went to white men.

"These two basic facts about the underpinnings of my life are examples of white privilege which I had not thought about before. The answer to 'I'm a good person—isn't that enough?' is NO. We can't get rid of our white privilege. The best we can do is to be aware of it, examine its roots and its consequences, and leverage it to work for greater justice and equality."

"I found the plenary by Vernā Myers inspiring yet funny: you can google her name and TED talk to hear it yourself. It's about 12 minutes."

"Much more to do, but so joyful. A release of energy when the weight of racial denial lifts. Yes there were still difficult moments—a sign of growing."

"1. I definitely came at this conference with the privileged/problematic mindset that IT would 'fix' my biased ideas. The conference did nothing of the sort, but alerted me to the work I have to do, and I hope gave me a springboard to do so.

2. There is no access code—I should not expect closure, or a quick fix to these problems. On the contrary, a quick fix will not be a just one, and to have 'closure' would be to become complacent with the way things are. ...

4. One thing I can start doing is recognizing my whiteness and the whiteness of the spaces/groups I spend time with.

5. Awareness doesn't fix the problem but is a first step. ...

6. A youth facilitator said, "The job of a white person in the fight for racial justice is to be a microphone for people of color—be loud, raise awareness, project a message, but make it THEIR voice that is heard."

7. Work in progress, work in progress, work in progress."

"The workshop 'Water Is Life: R U Fighting for your Life?' examined the water crisis in Flint, MI and its connections to racism, white privilege, and power. I learned that the UN has recognized access to water as a human right and that 56% of bottled water is tap water. The US has not adopted water as a human right. There is a global water crisis."

"Compelling and thought-provoking."

"Energized and encouraged, humbled and supported: I learned how to better appreciate hip hop, how to think more productively about organizing for racial change, even in small steps. The experience that touched my heart the most and has left me thinking about next steps was a session on transracial adoption I attended with my African American daughter and ex-partner. Many young attendees with painful experiences to work through talked to us after the session: I'm sitting with their stories and trying to discern whether we have a call to reach out to transracial adoptive families in some way."

"I expected the conference to be 'emotionally heavy'; I did not expect the energy and hope that I felt right from the start. The topics of white supremacy and racism are enormous, but the intelligence and commitment of the speakers (like the charismatic, young hip-hop artist Jasiri X, the conference opener) inspired and energized me. We heard from Yusef Salaam, one of the

'Central Park Five' who spent 15 years in prison for a crime he had no part of. Now he speaks tirelessly on behalf of the thousands of victims of mass incarceration. Professor Howard Stevenson's talk particularly moved me. He shared an audiotape of his conversation with his young son after the killing of Trayvon Martin. Such honesty, gentleness and love in his responses to his son! It also gave me a small window on how a young black boy might view the killing of young black men."

"How one needs to know herself, warts and all, to continue the work of equity and justice! And the film with the dad speaking to his son will always stay on my heart."

"The WPC pushed me to embark on a personal inventory—both emotional and practical—regarding my sense of white privilege and the extent to which I am aware of it, the ways in which I have benefited from it, and the manner in which I challenge it, if at all. I have long believed that a person growing up in a racist society will have racist ideas and that I have benefitted from racist institutions. Still I would like to feel that my success was based only on my own hard work and family support. But that is a defense challenged in Dr. Robin DiAngelo's workshop, 'White Fragility and the Rules of Engagement.' Her paper on how white people respond to critical feedback about our own racism (www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/11-ways-white-america-avoids-taking-responsibility-its-racism)

presents the roadblocks that white people set up to shut down criticism and continue institutional racism. It pains me to see how I have applied them in conversations about race and privilege and how 'f(F)riendly' they felt to me. To be able to be open to feedback from another regarding one's own racist behavior, no matter how it is given, will take spiritual striving."

"More than 2000 people—white people and people of color, elders and young people, people across the gender spectrum, people from many faiths (including 500 Quakers)—all of whom are finding their place in the work of challenging racism and white privilege, is inspiring and uplifting. Looking at issues of white privilege, and the harder frame of white supremacy, is challenging work, and can feel like it will lead only to despair, or at worst blaming. The WPC reminds me that doing this work can be filled with compassion and respect and can be liberating for all!

One workshop in particular challenged me to ask: What aspects of Quaker practices are unnecessarily rooted in a 'culture' (i.e., norms, values, beliefs, and ways of being) that is white middle class? Why and how might that matter? What would we learn by taking this question up at FMC? What might we do differently both at FMC and beyond from having explored this deeply? I am living into these questions."

"More to read, more to learn, but headed in the right direction."