

A DIFFERENT VIEW OF WHITE PRIVILEGE

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A woman in Meeting for Worship one First Day spoke a message that gave me a new insight on White Privilege. She spoke of seeing a blind man coping with an environment made for sighted people. She spoke of how thankful she is to have sight.

As I sat quietly thinking about her message, I too felt grateful to have the gift of vision. I thought how privileged I am to be sighted. I live in a world made by and for people with vision. I don't intentionally discriminate against blind people, but I clearly participate in a society that often puts blind people at a disadvantage. I needn't feel guilty about being sighted, and I needn't feel badly about this privilege. However, recognizing that I participate in systems that are biased against people with vision problems, I do feel a duty to make those systems more equitable. For me this is a matter of seeing that of God in everyone and of living the testimony of equality.

The previous day I had attended a meeting of the Working Party on Racism of the Ministry and Counsel Committee of New England Yearly Meeting. For part of that meeting we discussed how difficult it is for some people to accept the concept of White Privilege. Consequently, it was an easy step for me to go from recognizing the privilege that I have by being sighted to seeing the parallel with recognizing White Privilege. I don't feel guilty for being white; it's what I am. I don't intentionally discriminate against people of color. But I do participate in a racist society that systematically gives me many advantages over people of color. For me, saying that I have White Privilege is recognizing these advantages.

At NEYM sessions last August members of the Working Party held up signs with Queries about White Privilege, as people streamed out of the auditorium after one of the business sessions. Here are some of those queries:

- Do you often get asked “Why do you people think that way?”
- When you shop, are you shadowed by security?
- Do you have difficulty renting or buying housing in the places you choose or trouble getting a mortgage and insurance?
- When you read U.S. history, are the contributions of people who look like you absent?
- When you drive a nice car in the suburbs, do you risk being stopped by police? Being roughed up?
- Do you have to teach your sons to keep both hands on the steering wheel if a cop stops them?
- Do you worry whether your children will go to school with others who look like them?
- Are you the only person of your color in your Meeting or your neighborhood? Would you like to be?
- Is it difficult to find stores that carry foods of your cultural traditions?
- Is it difficult to find hairdressers who can deal with your hair?
- Is it hard to arrange to be in the company of people of your race most of the time?
- When you swear or wear old clothes, do people attribute this to the bad morals or poverty of your race?
- If you do well at something, will you be called “a credit to your race”?
- Do you have trouble finding toys or books that show people who look like your children?
- If you argue for promoting a person of color, will you be criticized for racial prejudice?
- If you work for an affirmative action employer, will co-workers suspect you were hired because of your race?
- When something bad happens to you, do you wonder whether it's because of race?
- Do you have trouble finding blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color that more or less matches your skin?

IF YOU REPLIED “NO” TO MOST OF THESE QUERIES, YOU HAVE WHITE PRIVILEGE.

If you have difficulty accepting this assertion, ask yourself if it is easier for you to feel privileged by being sighted (not blind). Why is it easier to accept privilege in one instance and not the other?