

Discussion Guide: “Will We Change?”

Discussion Guide based on Jeff Kisling’s blog post [*Decolonial Path for Quakers 11 – Will we change?*](#). This guide is designed to help Quaker communities or other spiritually grounded groups reflect on the themes of decolonization, environmental witness, and systemic change.

Discussion Guide: “Will We Change?”

Purpose

To explore how Quaker values intersect with decolonial practice, environmental justice, and resistance to oppressive systems—and to ask ourselves what meaningful change looks like today.

Opening Reflection

Begin with a moment of silence or a short reading from Quaker tradition or Indigenous voices. Invite participants to center themselves and reflect on the question:

“What does spiritual courage look like in the face of injustice?”

Key Themes & Queries

1. Spiritual Resistance

- Jeff Kisling shares his experience as a draft resister in 1969.

Query: How do we discern when spiritual conviction calls for civil disobedience?

Prompt: Share examples from your life or community where faith led to resistance.

2. Environmental Witness

- Kisling gave up owning a car in response to environmental degradation.

Query: What sacrifices are we willing to make for ecological integrity?

Prompt: What does “living your testimony” look like in the climate crisis?

3. Truth-Telling About History

- The post confronts Quaker involvement in Indian Boarding Schools.

Query: How do we reckon with our complicity in colonial systems?

Prompt: What steps can we take toward repair and accountability?

4. Power, Money, and Systemic Collapse

- Kisling critiques capitalist structures and the rise of authoritarianism.

Query: How do we challenge systems that prioritize profit over people?

Prompt: What role can Quaker communities play in building alternatives?

Action & Commitment

Invite participants to reflect on:

- One personal change they feel led to make.
- One collective action the group could take (e.g., supporting LANDBACK, mutual aid, or abolitionist organizing).

Suggested Resources

- [Quaker Spirituality and Decolonial Repair](#)
- [Queries on Reconciliation](#)

Closing Circle

End with each person sharing one insight or question they're taking with them. Optionally, close with a moment of silence or a blessing from Indigenous tradition (with permission and respect).

Decolonial Path for Quakers 11 – Will we change?

[Note: I've shared my experiences with the draft many times before. But I think that is relevant in a different way when considering decolonization.]

Previously I wrote, ***The question is, do we continue to accept the current dominant systems of colonial capitalist violence?***

The question reflects my history of frustrating experiences in trying to make **change** happen. Which raises the question of how does change occur? I've often wondered if I was going about it wrong. Who decides what the proposed changes would be? Who has the power to implement change?

If you believe, as I do, in the need for **decolonization**, the question becomes how do you **change** what is currently the **status quo**?

As a Quaker I believe in, and have had spiritual experiences to help guide me. Quakers as a body seek this spiritual guidance during our silent meetings for worship, during our business meetings, and in our daily lives. We believe in “letting our lives speak.” There is often tension between some of our beliefs and our actions. I feel this tension strongly when considering the injustices involved in the colonization of this country that I am living in and benefiting from.

I understood the significance of my first moral challenge, which was what to do about registering for the draft (Selective Service System). There were clearly safe choices, such as doing alternative service as a conscientious objector. I was led to believe that cooperating with the system in any way, even as a conscientious objector, was wrong. When I say I was led to believe, that is in reference to spiritual guidance. That process played out over a long period of time. Many Quaker meetings for worship, many discussions with friends and family, much study. The guidance to resist the draft only became stronger with time.

The question becomes how much a person is willing to risk for their convictions. Resisting the draft could result in a felony conviction, which would have life-long consequences.

I was very familiar with how often people would say they didn't think something was right, but it wasn't up to them to do anything about it. Or try to justify their own actions.

I was at a fork in the road. I could become a conscientious objector and fulfill the requirements for the draft despite my misgivings. Or I could resist and take the chance of imprisonment and a felony conviction.

I don't know if I could have resisted the draft had it not been for the example of a number of Quaker men being imprisoned for their convictions throughout history. Who let their lives

speak. My Quaker mentor, Don Laughlin, collected the stories of resistance to war and conscription. My Scattergood Friends School classmate, Daniel Barrett, was convicted for draft resistance. His story and others are in [Young Quaker Men Facing War and Conscription.](#)

Decolonization

Will we change? First, you have to believe something needs to change. This website and my other writings have focused on my views about settle-colonialism and the need for change for some time. I have learned, from my Native friends, to see the Christian colonial capitalist violence of this country's history and current state.

Fortunately, I've also been blessed to witness and engage in how we decolonize ourselves. For several years I was involved with Des Moines Mutual Aid, so I know how powerful **mutual aid** is. Both as a tool for organizing and as a way to meet essential needs. It was some time before I realize Des Moines Mutual Aid is a supported by the Great Plains Action Society (as I described in the previous post).

There are a number of efforts now related to **LANDBACK**, which involves not only returning land, but also Indigenous stewardship of the land. I'm happy to report that the Great Plains Action Society is building a community hub in downtown Iowa City. [Indigenous-led Great Plains Action Society plans community hub in Iowa City](#). Nonprofit looks to add urban garden, kitchens and office space by Megan Woolard Megan Woolard, The Gazette, Sept 11, 2025

Ways of war

Mutual aid is not only a tool of survival, but also a tool of revolution.

The more we take care of each other, the less they can fracture a community with their ways of war

Ronnie James



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