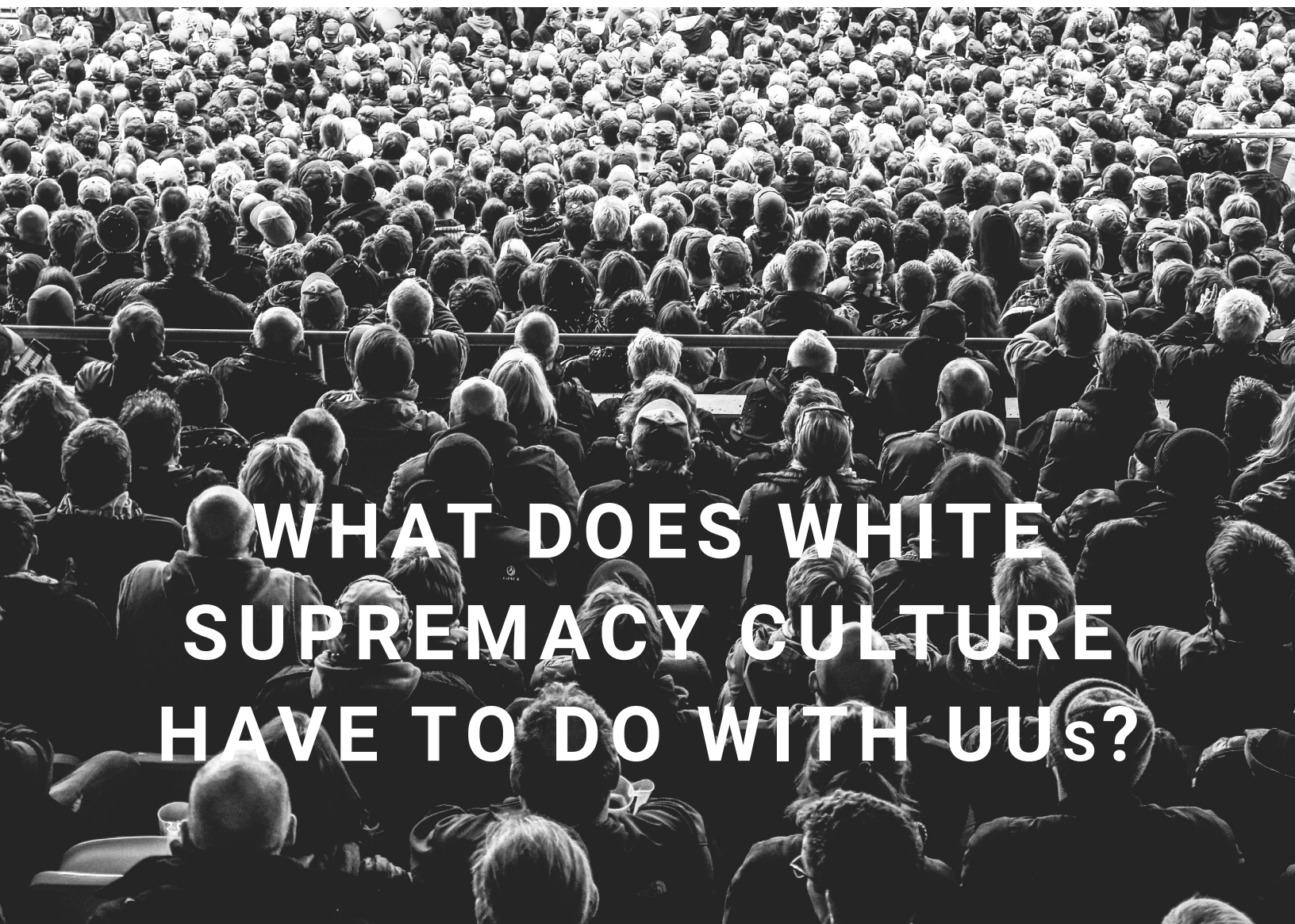


October 28, 2019

# SPEAKING OF JUSTICE

*Faith In Action*



WHAT DOES WHITE  
SUPREMACY CULTURE  
HAVE TO DO WITH UUs?

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER Issue No. 008

First Unitarian Portland II E-Magazine

Portland, Oregon

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Portland, Oregon

# CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF GRAND RONDE HOMELANDS



Click to enlarge

# *HONORING OF LAND AND PEOPLE*

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[First Unitarian Church](#) is located in the heart of downtown Portland. We honor the indigenous people on whose traditional and ancestral land we sit.

We recognize the Multnomah, Clackamas, Clowwewalla (or Willamette-Tumwater) and Cascades (or Watlala) bands of Chinookan peoples, and the Tualatin Band of Kalapuya.

These indigenous peoples signed the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855 and were later forcibly removed from their homelands to the Grand Ronde Indian Reservation; their descendants live today as members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Many other indigenous nations of the Columbia River have connections to this place as well, and their descendants also live on.

We acknowledge the ancestors and survivors of this place and recognize that we are here because of the sacrifices forced upon them. We honor their legacy, their lives, and their descendants who carry on Tribal traditions for present and future generations.

[The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde](#)

# FROM THE EDITORS

---

Welcome, Friends, to our Fall 2019 issue of Speaking of Justice: Faith in Action. We are glad you are journeying with us on a new year of learning as First Unitarian Portland lives out our social justice mission and as we continue to strive for the Beloved Community.

In an expression of love for self, for Unitarian Universalism, and for the people who comprise our faith communities, three UUs of color called for a Teach-In on “White Supremacy Culture” early in 2017. This was not the first time that our faith community has been called to examine and address racism’s prevalence. However, this call was particularly bold, as it dared to use the term “white supremacy” to name how racism and patriarchy – pillars of white supremacy culture – continue to push the interests, experiences, and contributions of People of Color to the margins of our faith while maintaining the dominant perspective of white people at the center.

These brave and loving UUs urged us to dig deep, to recognize the inextricable roots of white supremacy in this country and all its institutions, and to do a better job of listening, responding to, and welcoming voices of those most affected by its centuries-old crushing power. They asked us to see that the very forces of oppression our faith principles call us to resist and transform operate within and among us all. They asked us to humbly and courageously learn and live with awareness, with conviction, and with love so that all members of our faith are welcome, know that they belong, and are treated equitably, justly.

Our congregation, and the larger denomination, continue to hold a wide range of understanding, discomfort, and engagement on the topic of “white supremacy.” And yet, in our justice work, we are dealing directly with systems, institutions, and beliefs that uphold a dominant culture that centers and advantages whiteness, particularly those who most closely resemble this country’s “Founding Fathers”: White. Landed (or wealthy). Cis-men.

We, the editorial team, chose to dedicate this issue of Speaking of Justice to better understand what is meant by “white supremacy culture.” We aim to call us in to inquiry about how our work for justice can best align with the dismantling of systems that oppress, separate, disregard, and endanger our Black, Indigenous, People of Color siblings; our trans, gender-queer, and cis-female beloveds; our disabled siblings. We aim to explore how this work to transform a culture and its systems of white supremacy is liberating work, is spiritual work, and is important to how we live our faith as Unitarian Universalists.

In this issue you will find spiritual resources and testimonials, hear voices of youth who are delving into our history and who are organizing for our future, learn about efforts of our social justice action groups to chip away at racist and oppressive systems, and gain educational resources to help us expand our understanding.

Again, thank you for accompanying us on this faith-filled journey. We are grateful to be learning by your side.

*With love,*

*Dana Buhl,  
Program Director of Social Justice  
Nikki Beezley,  
Program Assistant of Social Justice Programs*

*Mindy Clark  
Janet Collier  
Ethel Gullette  
Alisa Joaquin  
Daniel Karnes  
Amanda Luell  
Jamie Marucha*



**First Unitarian Portland**

# *WE ALL NEED TO GET FREE*

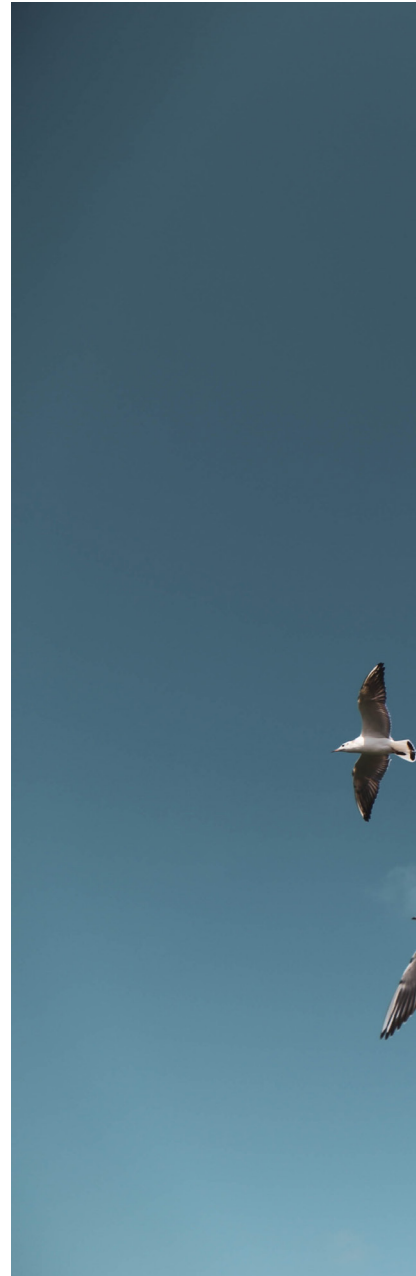
*“It goes on one at a time.  
It starts when you do it again, when they say ‘no.’  
It starts when you say ‘We’  
And know who you mean  
And each day, you mean one more.”*

*-Marge Piercy*

---

**Words:**

*Bill Sinkford, Senior Minister at First Unitarian Portland*







When Dana Buhl asked me to write about the spiritual resources that can support the work of dismantling white supremacy, I said ‘yes’ without hesitation. I have been trying to inspire, support, prod, cajole, and applaud the engagement of Unitarian Universalism with issues of race and culture for more than 50 years now.

And, as Sr. Minister of this church, articulating the spiritual grounding of this faith is part of my job.

So I will offer a list of resources (later), and I will point to the need for a persistence that this faith has never demonstrated on this issue. I doubt that many will be surprised that I see the need for persistence, for faithfulness, as a priority.

But perhaps the most important message I can offer is around the word “We.”

The needs and the resources are not the same for all of us.

For People of Color (and other folks whose identities have been marginalized by the culture we want to dismantle), the challenge is to remain engaged, to remain present, to accept the responsibility of having our voices “centered” and being over-represented at almost every leadership table.

The resources most of us need are, first, some safe space to relax and let down the guards we have learned to keep in place in a culture that is threatened by our empowerment and uncomfortable with our presence. Also the experience of some progress...not perfection... on the part of those in the dominant cultural position. And the experience of being welcomed.

The needs for white-identified folks are certainly different. I think I understand some of those needs. As your minister, I try to listen, hard, to what would help. There is a need for understanding of how racism and

patriarchy are built into virtually every one of the structures of our lives. But that intellectual understanding has to translate into a knowing of how this culture constrains and pushes down on white-identified persons – and white males most especially – even as it keeps others at the margins.

Folks on the margins know that we need to get free. But it is white-identified folks who need to claim freedom as your goal, too. We all need liberation. We all need to get free.\*

I’m doing it again. Trying to tell the progressive white community what you need. Though I do believe I know some of the signposts you need to pass on this journey, you need to listen to other white voices who are committed to this work and convicted to its long-term success.

UU Chris Crass writes, “Our goal is for our faith community to be spiritually alive, learning from and contributing to liberation culture and legacies. For our faith communities to be welcoming homes for people of all colors, sexualities, classes, ages, abilities, genders, and citizenship statuses. For our faith communities to regularly invite us into and prepare us for courageous action for collective liberation, held in loving community for the long haul.”

Listen to Chris Crass and sociologist Robin DiAngelo. And there are white voices in the congregation and its leadership that can point the way as well.

This period of engagement, this most recent 2nd or 3rd or 4th chance for all of us to move toward liberation, offers hope. Both within our faith and in the broader progressive culture, there is growing understanding and deeper commitment.

There is also, needless to say, more active resistance.

I am the first Black Minister of this church and was the first Black President of the UUA. Both UU seminaries are now led by their

first Presidents who are persons of color. The UU Ministers Association had its first Black President just last year. We are still in the era of “firsts.” Is it any wonder that as a faith community we have yet to get to clarity on how we are called to show up and on what change will look like? This is new territory for both People of Color and for White-Identified folks.

We are trying to do a new thing.

What resources do we need, each of us and all of us? Faithfulness because this is long haul work. Hope because we need a vision to call us forward. And love because without love we are all lost.

Authentic relationships of honesty and accountability are what love looks like, I believe, en route to the Beloved Community.

And one more thing. Our theology of oneness...UNI-tarianism and UNI-versalism... needs to make space and time, a generation or two perhaps, for more celebration of our individualities and the rich gifts of the various life experiences we bring. Authentic relationships are created and sustained by people who can and do show up as all that they are.

It starts when you say “We”  
And know who you mean...  
explicitly, particularly, culturally, humanly...  
And each day, you mean one more.

Blessings,  
Bill

---

*PS: A very good [list of resources](#) from both within and outside our faith has been compiled by the Liberal Religious Educators Association. To highlight my point about the need for white voices in this effort, the first 8 UU resources listed (including one from me) are by UU persons of color.*

\*With thanks to Kenny Wiley, African American former UU religious educator, for that phrase.

# WHAT DOES WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE HAVE TO DO WITH UUs?

Words:

Dana Buhl, Director of Social Justice

*In the United States, we live in paradox. We are a nation founded on notions of freedom and liberty, but built on occupied land with our economy fueled by the stolen labor of kidnapped and enslaved people.*

Slavery was outlawed over 150 years ago, yet, as [Michele Alexander](#) reminds us, more black men are imprisoned today than were enslaved in 1850. Author and activist Ibram X. Kendi explains that while there have been many antiracist advances in the U.S., such as the Voting Rights Act and the desegregation of public accommodations, there is also a present-day rise in the segregationist movement of “white nationalism.”

We also live out paradox. We hold beliefs that all people are created equal, while simultaneously maintaining racist and exclusionary systems. We continue to explore how this is true in Unitarian Universalism.

Kendi explains in his book *How to Be An Antiracist*, “A racist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups.” Every assessment of social, political, and economic realities demonstrates that racial inequities exist in all aspects of society: home ownership and houselessness, educational outcomes, income and family wealth, police stops and arrests, criminal sentencing, health and healthcare, exposure to environmental toxins, the impact of climate disruption, employment and pay disparities. The list goes on.

In all of these measures, the outcomes are better for white people than people who are

Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). Intentionally or otherwise, our social, political, and economic systems are racist, in that they consistently produce racially inequitable outcomes. They uphold concepts and structures of white supremacy, in that they specifically favor the success of white people over BIPOC. In fact, in all areas of society, including our social justice activism, if we don’t work for policies and practices consciously designed to produce racially equitable outcomes (e.g., anti-racist), we perpetuate racial disparities and maintain racist systems of white supremacy.

When we say “white supremacy,” are we talking only about those who wear swastikas or commit hate crimes? Does “white supremacy” refer exclusively to the beliefs of those who are active members in the growing movement of white nationalism? The answer is “No.” Sociologist Robin DiAngelo explains,

*White supremacy is not simply the idea that whites are superior to people of color (although it certainly is that), but a deeper premise that supports this idea – the definition of whites as the norm or standard for “human,” and people of color as an inherent deviation from that norm.*

It is these ideas, baked into the founding of this country, into all of the institutions created within it, and into the legacy of laws, policies,



General Assembly 2019

and practices throughout our history, that undergird the dominant culture of the United States: white supremacy culture.

As [Showing Up for Racial Justice](#) describes, “White supremacy culture is reproduced... by the media, the education system, western science (which played a major role in reinforcing the idea of race as a biological truth with the white race as the ‘ideal’ top of the hierarchy), and the Christian church.” By its nature, often described as the water in which we swim, culture is very difficult to see, especially by those who benefit from its norms, narratives, and material advantages.

Anti-racism trainers and activists from Dismantling Racism developed a useful resource that outlines some of the characteristics of [White Supremacy Culture](#) that function in organizations. Because they “are used as norms and standards without being proactively named or chosen,” they both reflect and reinforce dominant cultural patterns that operate to maintain the status quo.

So what do we do about it? Kendi writes, “The

only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it – and then dismantle it.” The same goes for white supremacy culture, because they are inseparable. It is not something we can wish away, nor are we absolved of our participation in a system of inequality simply because we believe all people are inherently good or equal. As members of a liberal faith that seeks a world in which all people are free to thrive, we are called to practice the internal work – both within each of us and within our congregations – to make the changes necessary for this to be so.

What does this mean for UUs? Reverend Bill Sinkford wrote about the challenge to BIPOC in our shared liberation work of dismantling white supremacy culture. The challenge to those of us who are white is different, particularly in pushing against internalized messages of superiority and saviorism, numbness and complacency. To do that, we educate ourselves about history from non-dominant perspectives. We give ourselves space to grieve that the majority of what we have learned about “our history” was fabricated to make us out to be the righteous leaders, the

heroes, the saviors. We let go of the delusion that we have earned everything we have and seek information about the [history of white supremacy in Oregon](#) and the U.S. We learn about racism and about our own behaviors that reinforce it from those most affected by it.

We put our bodies into this work. We take risks to fight for antiracist policies. We join social justice action groups, such as Ending Mass Incarceration/Advancing Racial Justice and the Immigrant Justice Action Group, that are fighting racial justice. We actively organize to oppose overt white supremacy and hate. [See the article on Portland United Against Hate.] Miriel Manning, Social Justice Coordinator of the Granite Peak UU Congregation, [tells us](#),

*“Challenging white nationalism means fighting for climate justice, trans-liberation, economic equity, racial justice, indigenous rights, anti-capitalism. Our struggles are interconnected.”*

We honor space for Black, Indigenous and People of Color to gather, heal, organize, and worship together, without our needing to know how and what they are doing for their liberation. We put material resources and energy into supporting that holy work.

We stop calling white supremacy “white

privilege” because, as justice activist Tawana Petty explains in her book [Toward Humanity](#), it is not a privilege to participate in the oppression of others. We give up paternalism and understand that this work is about our own liberation from a system that distorts our humanity. We take time to grieve, rage, and despair with people who are on the journey of dismantling white supremacy with us. We also take time to celebrate, sing, dance, and be joyous, because getting free feels good! We forgive ourselves for the harm that we cause, we apologize, then we get back up and continue our faithful work for mutual liberation. We “call in” our friends and family to this work, and we love each other all the while.

Fundamentally, we reach for humility. We acknowledge that the ways we know how to do things are not functioning to dismantle racism and white supremacy. That means letting ourselves feel unmoored as we admit we don’t know how to fix it on our own. We make mistakes in public, and we keep going, because that’s how we find the way together.

This is not easy work. It is, however, faithful work. To live our belief in equality and the inherent worth of all beings, to regain our full humanity – this is healing and holy work.

*James Baldwin said, “There is never a time in the future in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment; the time is always now.”*



# CLIMATE STRIKE

Words:

Bryan Brumley, Community For Earth (CFE)

Unitarians marched by the score during the Climate Strike in September, showing solidarity with young people throughout the world, especially those fighting for climate justice in Oregon. Worldwide, the climate justice group [350.org](http://350.org) says more than 76 million people took part in the week of Global Climate Strikes in 185 countries.

First Unitarian's Community for Earth (CFE), which organized our Climate Strike contingent, has developed deep alliances in the environmental justice movement in Oregon, including underserved communities and young people of color. We have many common goals, such as blocking construction of the proposed natural gas pipeline to Jordan Cove and expansion of the Zenith tar sands oil export facility in Portland. But, we also have differences of opinion on some issues, with many CFE members backing the carbon cap and trade bill that stalled in the Oregon legislature this year. "Many coalition members of the Oregon Just Transition Alliance (OJTA) opposed that proposal, favoring stronger measures," said Maria Hernandez Segoviano of OPAL, a leader of the alliance.

OJTA members also are working with city officials on implementation of the Portland Clean Energy Fund, passed by ballot measure last November. As for advocacy, OJTA is focusing on an Oregon Green New Deal (see link [ojta.org](http://ojta.org)), with emphasis on transportation issues affecting young people, especially historically underserved communities.

"We are highlighting youth access to safe transportation systems," said Hernandez, who has helped organize several climate justice events at First Unitarian. The alliance is closely watching a bond issue being developed by Metro to fund improvements to public transit, suggesting changes designed to help underserved young people.

The Community for Earth remains in active dialogue with OJTA, and also with other First Unitarian social justice groups, and will be planning events that again will bring their voices into our church.



Climate Strike walk in Portland, OR 2019

# WHERE DOES IT HURT?

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**Words:**

*Ryan Deibert, First Unitarian Portland Board of Trustees*

Ruby Sales, Civil Rights activist and public theologian, asks us as a guiding spiritual question, “Where does it hurt?”

As a white person coming to the work of dismantling the deeply harmful culture of whiteness, I answer that, on the best days, it hurts in my heart broken open, held closely by my siblings in this work.

More often, though, it hurts right here, at the small of my back, the spot where Rev. angel Kyodo Williams, Sensei, teaches us from embodied wisdom that our integrity – the lower half of our bodies – meets our inherent worth and dignity – the upper half. It’s also the spot where many feel support from their ancestors – a sense of – lineage and generational wisdom. My feelings of inherent worth and dignity are strong. But my lack of integrity within the broader structures of whiteness feels like it cannot hold, and I’ve lost connection to my ancestors’ strength. And it hurts, right here, where each of those meets in the small of my back.

Whiteness has cut me off at the roots, divorcing me from the cultural knowledge of my ancestors, their deep understanding of the land and of God. Thousands of years of beautiful humanness and love that we traded, often eagerly and brutally, for the false promises of material comfort and social superiority. Thousands of years of prophetic, mystical knowing that we ceded to the aching, misguided shallowness of patriarchal religions

and a deeply repressive civic life that told us exactly where we could be – and we were good with all of it, as long as we stayed even marginally above black and brown people.

I initially came to the work of ending the culture of white supremacy with a more outward focus, driven by my desire to decrease harm to my friends and colleagues of color. With their guidance and allyship, we’re helping to achieve that. But as I continue, I find more and more that I’m in it for my own liberation as part of the collective liberation that we often name the Beloved Community. I do this work to reconnect more deeply to myself, to feel where it hurts, and to find again a sense of lineage and rootedness in compassion, love, and community that my people lost in whiteness along the way.

And, quite honestly, I do that work here at First Church with both hesitance and joyful commitment, as I’ve found both a community that spiritually supports and holds me accountable in the work, but, as often, a community of people asleep in the comfort of our whiteness, who can hold the Beloved Community as a warm-and-fuzzy, far-off vision for someone else, rather than finding what hurts and working toward our own liberation, right here and right now. I do this work, and do it here at First Church, because I love and feel deeply loved by so many of you. On the best days, it hurts there, in my heart broken open, held by each of you.



# *POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY TEAM*

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**Words:**

*Mark Woodlief, Police Accountability Team (PAT)*

First Unitarian's Police Accountability Team (PAT) began meeting last June as an outgrowth of the group UUs Stop Racist Policing (UUSR). PAT continues UUSR's work of centering Police Accountability through an antiracist lens. PAT's 10 participants include members of the Ending Mass Incarceration/Advancing Racial Justice and the Immigrant Justice Action groups. PAT works closely with Brandon Lee, co-founder of Training 4 Transformation and author of [Best Practices in Community Conscious Policing](#).

PAT has been looking deeply into the Portland Police Association's contract, which will be renewed in June 2020. PAT member and First Unitarian Portland's Social Justice Director, Dana Buhl, asked Rev. Bill Sinkford and First Unitarian Portland to join community coalitions such as Unite Oregon, Jobs With Justice, Albina Ministerial Alliance, and others in signing a public letter entitled "For a Fair Police Contract

That Serves the Public." The letter demanded specific changes to the contract, such as:

- *Improve Portland's ineffective system of civilian oversight.*
- *Hold officers accountable for excessive force.*
- *Institute comprehensive mandatory drug testing after incidents of excessive force.*

There is much work to be done regarding police accountability, and it can seem daunting. But there is a citywide – and nationwide – awareness that police contact, including arrests, as well as excessive and fatal use of force, disproportionately impact black, indigenous, and Latinx communities. There is a growing movement to hold our police accountable to the communities in which they serve, and PAT is connecting with many individuals and organizations to help make that goal a reality.

# *PORTLAND UNITED AGAINST HATE*

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**Words:**

*Dana Buhl, Director of Social Justice*

Since the inauguration of Donald Trump in January 2017, and the rise of white nationalism, the number of incidents of hate crimes and of intimidation has grown in Portland, in Oregon, and across the country. Such incidents include bullying and violence stemming from racism, xenophobia, religious bigotry, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, stigma, and misogyny. To respond to this rise in violence and intimidation, and to build a safer community for all of our neighbors, [Portland United Against Hate \(PUAH\)](#) was established.

With over 80 member and endorsing community organizations, PUAH believes that everyone and every community deserves a safe, prosperous, and peaceful life, a life free from hate and harassment. First Unitarian Portland is a coalition member and sits on the Steering Committee.

With the technical and organizing leadership of the Coalition of Communities of Color, PUAH developed the [ReportHatePDX.com](#) tracking tool. At this site, people can also find instructions for how to connect with one of the many community-based organizations that can help report a given incident and provide valuable counseling and support services to those targeted by hate.

Part of PUAH's mission is also to help community-facing organizations provide training, culture-shifting work, and capacity building to create a strong base of support for communities most affected by hate violence. Each year, PUAH works with the City of Portland to encourage community organizations to apply for grants for these activities. In 2019, \$225,000 was made available for this purpose; organizations can apply for grants up to \$50,000.



David Camppt's White Ally Toolkit at First Unitarian Portland 2019

# WHAT I LEARNED FROM DAVID CAMPT'S WHITE ALLY TOOLKIT

Words:

Mindy Clark, First Unitarian Portland Board of Trustees

Unitarian Universalists have been working for racial justice for a long time, and we thought we had helped make progress. However, the recent developments in our national leadership and culture have shown us that there is still a lot of work to do.

As a white woman of privilege, I have wanted to contribute in some way to move the country toward equity and away from racism. I have struggled with not knowing what I could do, and my behavior has been influenced by what I now recognize as two unconscious white supremacy culture behaviors, "Only One Right Way," and the "Right to Comfort." (The latter should be read as my right not to look foolish.) So, I was paralyzed by not knowing the "right" thing to do and not knowing if I could do it once I figured out what it was.

It turned out to be both simpler and more difficult than I had imagined. In the recent workshops on becoming a spiritually grounded

anti-racist offered here at First Unitarian, I learned that one of the most powerful things I can do is to have respectful conversations with people who hold racist views. I don't have to march in every demonstration (though showing solidarity with our siblings of color is also a good thing to do); I simply have to be brave enough to speak, but more importantly to listen and connect from the heart to people I have long avoided as hopeless.

Over two days, Dr. David Campt took us through a process for engaging in conversation with racists by listening to the personal experiences that animate their beliefs, finding a way to connect with even a small piece of that experience, and expanding the story to include a personal experience of my own that shows why I believe racism still exists. This is a very simplified version of what we did and learning to do it well takes practice. Now it's up to me to use the tools I have learned.

# HISTORY OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN OREGON

Words:

Alisa Joaquin

So much that we have been taught about American History has been lies, perpetually told so many times that we believe them. There is more to history than the dominant narrative. And much of that history has been buried or simply not recorded. I took a four-week class illustrating this very fact. The class was called White Supremacy: History and Current Issues in Oregon.

I highly recommend this class. It will open your eyes to how long and how deeply white supremacy has been, and continues to be, a part of our lives. The instructor, Kristen Teigen, is very knowledgeable about past and current events. Each week she provides articles, videos, and reflection questions. One such

reflection that impacted me was "What were the stories you've been told about Oregon's founders?" For me, as someone who was not raised in Oregon, its history seemed to focus solely on the [Oregon Trail and Manifest Destiny](#).

What I took away from the four-week class was that we still have a lot of work to do to redress and repair what the dominant culture has done to people of color and to native tribes. We must take a hard look at history, even if we are afraid of what we will find, and then be willing to look at ourselves and our complicity in order to make substantial change. The story isn't complete without accessing the full truth. I am committed to continuing to learn.

**“There’s still work  
Get out there and  
we redeem the s**



work left to be done.  
push and pull until  
soul of America.”

- *John Lewis*

# *YRUU CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNEY*

**Introduction:**

*Nicole Bowmer,  
Associate Director of Family Ministries*

**Reflections:**

*YRUU Students*

***On August 4, 2019***, fifteen of our high schoolers from YRUU (Young Religious Unitarian Universalists) took a weeklong journey through the Mississippi Delta, Montgomery, Selma, Birmingham, and Memphis. Along with five adult chaperones, the youth experienced not only the historical sites of the Civil Rights Era, but they also explored civil rights in a contemporary context with visits to the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) in Jackson, Mississippi, and a women's health clinic in Montgomery, Alabama, that continues to provide abortions despite recent state legislation banning these procedures, including in cases of rape and incest.

(Abortions are still legal in Alabama while the ban is contested in the courts.)

On the last day of the trip, after attending the Sunday service at First Unitarian Church of Memphis, one youth said, "In Portland, religion isn't very prominent. In the South, though, it's a major part of daily life. Being here for just a week showed me how powerful religion can be to some people, and both the good and bad things this can cause." Another youth responded, "Religion isn't inherently good or bad. It depends on the people and what they do with it."

We offer the First Unitarian congregation our immense gratitude for reminding us of the good that can be created by a religious community. As a gesture of thanks to everyone who contributed to make this journey possible, we share excerpts of youth reflections in this issue of Speaking of Justice.









**I**t was easy for me as a Northerner to dismiss the whole trip at first, thinking that I already knew everything I needed to know. This idea of superiority, seeing it as not “my” concern, is one that many people still believe. I realized on this trip that if all of us see these issues as “our” issues, they will be easier to solve.

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**T**here is a huge difference between reading about or watching a video about something and being in the place where it happened. Not only was it life changing and moving to be in places like Medgar Evers’s and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s homes, the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and the courtroom of Emmett Till’s murder trial, but we learned about things that were extremely horrible, like how many people were lynched, and extremely powerful, like children coming together in Birmingham to fight for their rights.

Another thing that was so impactful to me was the people. The people we met and who spoke to us, like the Freedom Riders, who gave us hope and told us to keep fighting. The people we met who exchanged a few words with us but were so friendly.

I can’t express enough how much of a difference in my life this trip made for me, a person who I thought was very aware and knowledgeable about the world around her. It’s made me a better person.

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**I** know that this experience has changed me for the better. It also helped me realize how it’s not only the South that has its problems, it’s everywhere. This trip made a big impact on my life, and I am so sincerely grateful that I was able to experience the history no matter how hard. It was really a beautiful trip. Not happy beauty, just pure beauty at the struggle and the ways people keep going.

*T*here were numbing, horrifying museums that rip you apart. There were loving, underestimated compassion and strength from the locals. There was the realization that a life without service and action is an incomplete life.

There's more open-mindedness and a willingness to interact, engage, and connect with all people to try to understand how each of us came to be.

This trip has been transformative in every sense of the word.

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*T*his trip was very hard. To see what has been done to African Americans – the most brutal, terrible, dehumanizing, disgusting things you could ever imagine – is heartbreaking. Every time I saw a new tragedy, it physically hurt. I felt guilty and angry and sad and broken and discouraged.

But that's not all I felt because each one was countered with something beautiful. An action, however small, that showed there is still love and hope and good in the world. And these come from people. Sweet, thoughtful, funny, caring, beautiful, amazing people.

So that's what I took away from this trip more than anything: yes, there are terrible things in this world. But good, loving people, the things they do and our connections with them will always be there. There are people fighting back, through big things like marches, demonstrations, and inspiring speeches. But also through little things. A genuine smile from a cashier. A strange and amazing interaction with a stranger. Staying up until 4 a.m. just talking with people you love so much. All of it, those things will always be here. And I think that matters.

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*I*f we're going to change America, it can't be out of a place of hate for America. It has to be out of a place of love for what America can be.



# A LOOK AT THE NEW YORK TIMES "1619 PROJECT"

Words:

Daniel Karnes

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When I first learned of The New York Times *1619 Project*, I thought it was simply a special issue of the weekly NYTimes Magazine. Turns out it's much, much more than that. The issue contains personal essays, fiction, historical summaries, poems, imagery, sidebars describing the origin of one or another taken-for-granted American institution. In sum, the articles attempt a reframing of the story we Americans tell ourselves of our beginnings and of our path to today, connecting the dots between the "peculiar institution" of chattel slavery that began four hundred years ago on what was to become United States soil and the conditions that exist in this country today, ones that at first thought we do not automatically connect: health care, freeway planning, popular music, or municipal bonds.

As Jake Silverstein says in the introductory Editors Note:

*Out of slavery — and the anti-black racism it required — grew nearly everything that has truly made America exceptional: its economic might, its industrial power, its electoral system, diet and popular music, the inequities of its public health and education, its astonishing penchant for violence, its income inequality, the example it sets for the world as a land of freedom and equality, its slang, its legal system and the endemic racial fears and hatreds that continue to plague it to this day.*

1619 was the year when a ship arrived at Point Comfort in the British colony of Virginia with a cargo of 20 to 50 enslaved Africans. The producers of the magazine project identify that event — when the settlers of the colony purchased the captured humans in exchange for food and supplies, and relegated them, and their eventual descendants, to unpaid work — rather than the signing of the Declaration of Independence 157 years later, as the true point in time of our country's origin.

In other words, according to the project's organizers, that original event, the institution of slavery in the colony — and its consequences — and the resistance, resilience, and contributions of black Americans are at the very center of who we are as a country.

The magazine issue is consequential in itself. It is available online, for free; a PDF version is also available. But there is more: as the Wikipedia article notes, the project quickly expanded to encompass "multiple issues of the magazine, accompanied by related materials on multiple other publications of the Times as well as a project curriculum developed in collaboration with the Pulitzer Center, for use in schools." And there is a podcast, currently offering up to four issues.

# *HOW WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE RELATES TO THE WORK OF ENDING MASS INCARCERATION/ADVANCING RACIAL JUSTICE (EMI-ARJ)*

**Words:**

*Ethel Gullette, Coordinating Team Member of EMI-ARJ*

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We are immersed in a culture of white supremacy, and this culture promotes the idea that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to people of color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. Without a doubt, this culture is the backdrop for every injustice we work to address in EMI-ARJ.

Our mission as a group is “to prioritize racial justice as we work to dismantle unjust and inhumane policies and practices that contribute to mass incarceration. We work with congregants, community groups, and those most impacted to replace unjust policies and practices with restorative and equitable approaches that strengthen, rather than damage, individual lives, families, and communities.”

Mass incarceration disproportionately impacts people of color. The relationship between pervasive, ongoing, systemic racism in our society, including within our criminal justice

system, and white supremacy thinking is beyond obvious. For these reasons, EMI/ARJ promotes a three-pronged approach to combating mass incarceration and to advancing racial justice.

First, we strive to educate ourselves and our community about the many aspects of systemic racial injustices locally and nationally, particularly as they contribute to mass incarceration and the criminal justice system. Second, we support, ally with, and seek guidance from organizations and communities representing those most affected by racist practices in our justice system.

Third, we advocate for laws, policies, and practices that are humane, just, and equitable. Toward this end, the Police Accountability Team (PAT), an arm of our action group, is working to affect community-conscious policies and practices, including accountability-related measures in the renegotiation of the Portland Police Association contract.

# *EVIDENCE OF RACISM PERSISTS IN STATISTICS ON HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS*

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Words:

*Julia Griffiths, Committee on Hunger and Homelessness (COHHO)*

**L**ook at the statistics of hunger and homelessness in Oregon and the US, and you'll find that racial disparities persist. Non-white people experience hunger and homelessness at rates that are greater than their overall portion of the population. That's true in Multnomah County, in Oregon, and in the US. Here's an overview based on reports from Multnomah County, Oregon Food Bank, USDA, HUD, and Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF).

## **HUNGER**

In Oregon, 24% of the population is non-white (KFF), but 52% of Oregon Food Bank clients are non-white. According to the US Department of Agriculture, "Black and Hispanic-headed households are twice as likely to be food insecure than white families." Specifically, 12.5% of US households experienced food insecurity in 2017, but that number is 22.5% for African American households and 18.5% for Hispanic households.

## **HOMELESSNESS**

Racial disparities in homelessness are even more striking. According to the 2019 Multnomah County Point in Time Count (PIT), people of color account for 58.1% of total unhoused

population, compared to 29.5% in 2017. During that time, the overall unhoused population decreased by about 5.8%.

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) PIT report for 2018, non-whites account for 51.2% of people experiencing homelessness despite being only 59% of the US population.

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

Put simply, being white puts one at a lower risk of hunger and homelessness. And when things get better, the benefits reach white people first.

## **WHAT DO WE DO?**

Oregon Food Bank asked their clients in 2018 what would make food assistance less necessary. Their responses? Employment, including better jobs and higher wages; federal benefits that keep pace with cost of living (benefits like SNAP and Social Security); and affordable housing. As you advocate for a community that embraces the inherent worth and dignity of all people, seek out evidence and solutions that acknowledge and address racism and provide structural, equitable remedies that improve the outcomes for people of color.

# *CONNECT WITH FIRST UNITARIAN PORTLAND*

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## *The Social Justice Office*

**Dana Buhl, Director of Social Justice**  
dbuhl@firstunitarianportland.org  
Office #: 503.228.6389 ext. 442

**Nikki Beezley, Program Assistant for Social Justice & Communications**  
nbeezley@firstunitarianportland.org  
Office #: 503.228.6389 ext. 132

**Rev. Bill Sinkford, Senior Minister**  
bsinkford@firstunitarianportland.org

**Rev. Thomas Disrud, Associate Minister**  
tdisrud@firstunitarianportland.org





# ***SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION GROUPS***

## ***AT FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF PORTLAND***

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### ***AFRICA CONNECTIONS***

Contact: Anne Pickar  
apickar@cs.com

### ***COMMITTEE ON HUNGER & HOMELESSNESS (COHHO)***

Contact: Lois Heinlein  
matlein@gmail.com

### ***COMMUNITY FOR EARTH (CFE)***

Contact: Bryan Brumley  
bebrumley@yahoo.com

### ***ECONOMIC JUSTICE ACTION GROUP (EJAG)***

Contact: Michael Wade  
wade.michael@comcast.net

### ***PEACE ACTION GROUP (PAG)***

Contact: Tess Beistel  
tesslovesgreen7@gmail.com

### ***UU ANIMAL MINISTRY (UAM)***

Contact: Keith Iding  
torturgamigo@gmail.com

### ***UUs FOR JUSTICE IN THE MIDDLE EAST (UJME)***

curt.c.bell@gmail.com

### ***ENDING MASS INCARCERATION/ ADVANCING RACIAL JUSTICE (EMI/ARJ)***

Contact: Ethel Gullette  
effieg47@gmail.com

### ***IMMIGRANT JUSTICE ACTION GROUP (IJAG)***

Contact: Ann Zawaski  
annzawaski@gmail.com

### ***LGBTQIA PRIDE***

Contact: Lonnie Martinez  
nomoredramao711@gmail.com

### ***MENTAL HEALTH ACTION GROUP (MHAG)***

Contact: Rosebud Kirwin-Alvord  
rbka1@frontier.com

*\*Contacts are subject to change*