

Unitarian Universalism (UU) history has reflected the white culture and white supremacy history of our United States. While we can point to a few UU abolitionists in the 1800s, we also have a former Universalist minister in the 1920s who was a Ku Klux Klan member and held Klan meetings at the church (UUWorld, 2018).

In 2017, Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed at the Minns Lectures at First Church in Boston spoke about how our lack of knowledge about the engagement of Blacks in our denomination biases our understanding of who we UUs are today. (See link below.) arj

The contributions of Blacks to our UU development have often been hidden. Few of us know that in 1956, a survey reported 80 Unitarian congregations had African American members, and 49 of those congregations had active African American officers – 10% of our congregations had Black leadership. Few of us know of the contributions of Margaret Moseley, Isaac G. McNatt, or Harold B. Jordan. Nor Fannie Barrier Williams or Frances Watkins Harper. Scholarships for Black ministers were not being offered; African American music was not in our hymnals (until 1993); fundraising for missions went to other than Black groups; our religious education did not include the contributions of Blacks. Blacks were invisible or even considered a detriment as a Wisconsin congregation stated in 1954: “As for negroes, they could be members, but would not be called to fill our pulpit as that would further complicate our foremost problem, that of survival.”



Perhaps many of us are familiar with the work of UU antiracism activists in the 1960s, particularly the Selma march, and like to think UUs have always been antiracist. But small towns had “sundown” laws (whereby a Black person could not be out on the streets after sundown) and urban cities had secret covenants (whereby residential properties could not be sold to Blacks). These agreements impacted where Blacks could live and how they could participate, including participation in religious groups.

Sadly, following the activism in the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, as a denomination, we made commitments to improve our inclusion of Blacks and then utterly failed. The UUA committed millions in funds to support and welcome Blacks in Unitarian Universalism but the money was not raised.

In the 1990s, after the loss of many wonderful Black leaders and congregants, things started to shift. In 1992, at General Assembly, a Resolution of Immediate Witness stated that the delegates affirm and support the vision “of a racially diverse and multicultural Unitarian Universalism.” The UUA Board was asked to create a group to work to make

this happen. A report, developed over 5 years by the UUA Racial and Cultural Diversity Task Force, entitled “Journey Towards Wholeness – The Next Step: From Racial and Cultural Diversity to Anti-Oppression and Anti-Racist Multiculturalism,” led to the 1997 resolution at General Assembly, called [Toward an Anti-Racist Unitarian Universalist Association](#), to carry forward the vision outlined in the report. (See also in 2022: The 25th Anniversary report acknowledging work within the denomination to address racism: <https://www.uua.org/central-east/blog/better-together/anti-racism-25th-ann>)

But the UU denomination is one of local polity. Despite the recognition at the national level that much work needed to be done to open ourselves to becoming multicultural and antiracist, it could not be done within each congregation without the individual congregation taking action. Throughout the 2000s, we have slowly seen development at all levels to make changes.

In 1998, DRUUMM formed – Diverse Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) UUs. DRUUMM has caucus groups for Indigenous People, Asian American and Pacific Islanders, Latinx, and others. DRUUMM is not within the UUA but is an affiliate. In 2005, UU Allies for Racial Equity (ARE) formed an antiracist white allies group to partner with DRUUMM. In 2015, Black Lives of Unitarian Universalists (BLUU) was formed to support Black UU members. These affinity groups are necessary to strengthen the work of non-whites in our denomination and congregations. (See more at uua.org.)

Paula Cole Jones from All Souls in Washington, DC (along with Bruce Pollack from Restoration in Philadelphia) initiated approval of an 8th Principle in 2019. Individual congregations were asked to have a process that educated the congregation about not just voting to be antiracist, but how to take action to dismantle racism and learn about multiculturalism and pluralism. The 8th Principle asked congregations to be held accountable in their antiracist efforts. Hundreds of congregations approved the 8th Principle. The concepts in it were incorporated in Article II revisions of the UUA by-laws (see <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/shared-values>) approved in 2024, which include 6 values with LOVE at the center. Particularly, PLURALISM recognizes that we are all sacred beings, diverse in culture, experience, and theology. And, JUSTICE is the work we undertake to become a diverse, multicultural Beloved Community where all thrive and feel welcome.



Trainings were offered to local congregations, such as Jubilee Trainings (specifically about racism and antiracism) and Beloved Conversations (which has a broader theme about inclusiveness). Side With Love was created as an action arm of the UUA to address social justice issues. They range from climate to LGBTQIA+ to protecting democracy to addressing racism. Here is their UUA statement regarding dismantling white supremacy.

<https://www.uua.org/action/statements/undoing-systemic-white-supremacy>

In the 2020s, UUA developed MOSAIC, which is an online hub of resources and support for UUs dismantling racism and oppression. In response to the recommendations of the Commission on Institutional Change's (COIC) 2020 report, Widening the Circle of Concern, the UUA has created and curated anti-racism resources and programs to support an antiracist transformation at the congregation level, and curricula have been developed for all ages—literally from kindergarten through adults, which become available once you have completed the [facilitator training](#).

In 2026, the UUA is launching a certification program for congregations engaged in antiracist, multicultural transformation. Congregational transformation involves: 1) EDUCATION: Learning about race and racism for myself and for my congregation; 2) INTERNAL ACTIONS: Looking at our congregational policies and actions through an antiracism lens; and 3) EXTERNAL ACTIONS: Entering into partnerships with non-white groups to take action.

Resources on the UUA website:

<https://www.uua.org/justice/dismantle-white-supremacy>

<https://www.uua.org/giving/awards/distinguishedservice/recipient/paula-cole-jones>

Articles

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/wakanda-or-watts>

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/true-my-lineage>

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/black-hole-white-uu-psyche>

Books (available through uua.org):

Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity and Power in Ministry

Mistakes and Miracles: Congregations on the Road to Multiculturalism

Widening the Circle of Concern

Poems and meditations by Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed with Jacqui James:

Voices from the Margins

Been In the Storm So Long

By Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed:

Black Pioneers in a White Denomination

Darkening the Doorways: Black Trailblazers and Missed Opportunities in Unitarian