

Military Ministry Workshop 3

Handout 1: History of Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist Response to United States' Wars

- Unitarian and Universalist institutions have, at times, supported what is identified as “just war” and, at times, argued against war itself or against particular wars. There have always been religious leaders and lay people who fell on both sides of any debate about support for particular military actions, as well as debate about whether to engage in military action of any kind.
- Unitarians and Universalists took different positions on United States' wars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries depending on the circumstances of the war and their own regional and political affiliations. This record is summarized in “Embattled Faith,” an article appearing in the July/August 2003 issue of *UU World* magazine:

Some of the Congregational churches that had called for the American Revolution in New England also embraced Unitarianism a generation later. (Boston's Second Church, led by the Rev. John Lathrop from 1768 to 1816, was called “a nest of hornets” by the British.) The Universalist minister John Murray was a chaplain in the Continental Army. On the other hand, most Unitarians opposed the War of 1812. The Rev. William Ellery Channing, who helped form the American Unitarian Association in 1825, also helped found the American Peace Society a few years later. The Rev. Edmund Hamilton Sears wrote the Christmas carol “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” as a peace hymn in response to the Mexican– American War. But Unitarians overwhelmingly supported the Union cause during the Civil War. Thirty ministers served as chaplains; prominent Unitarian officers included Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Col. Robert Gould Shaw; the poet Julia Ward Howe wrote “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” as an anthem for the Union Army. A decade later, however, she would come full circle. Appalled by the slaughter of the Franco– Prussian War, she issued a proclamation calling for the establishment of Mothers' Day in the name of peace: “Arise, then, women of this day! Say firmly: ‘Our husbands shall not come to us reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy, and patience.’”

- There were Universalists who served on both sides of the Civil War, including

Rev. Quillen Hamilton Shinn, a late-19th-century missionary who spoke in his sermons of his service in the Union Army and James Anderson Inman, co-founder of Inman's Chapel in North Carolina, who joined the Confederate Army in 1860, taking with him his Bible and a book by Universalist Thomas Whittemore.

- In the 20th century, there was strong support among the Unitarians for U.S. entry into World War I with the mission to make the world safe for democracy. Pacifist ministers, including John Haynes Holmes, were cut off from aid from the denominational body, which later apologized for this stance. You can find out more about this series of events in [The Taft-Holmes Debate](#), a story from Resistance and Transformation: Unitarian Universalist Social Justice History, Workshop 5. On the other hand, Clarence Russell Skinner, professor of Applied Christianity at the Universalist Theological School at Tufts, was defended by the school's dean when his pacifist stance came under attack.
- World War II was widely viewed as a just war and the American Unitarian Association issued a statement in favor of military action, while still calling for respect for those who were conscientious objectors. The Universalist Christian Register published essays denouncing Hitler while the denomination collected War Relief Funds to aid both soldiers and civilians in the battlefields of Europe and Asia. Many individual Universalists and Unitarians served in the conflict.
- The war in Vietnam tore the nation, and Unitarian Universalist congregations, apart. Many clergy, as well as many people in the pews, strongly opposed the war on moral grounds and took public stances against the war. Some questioned the morality of war itself and moved toward or into a pacifist position. Others in the pews did not agree, believing that the Vietnam War was a justified use of United States military; many of them simply left Unitarian Universalism. You can find out more about this period of time in [Workshop 10](#) of the UUA Tapestry of Faith program Resistance and Transformation: Unitarian Universalist Social Justice History
- The response to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that began in 2003 and 2001 has been more nuanced. Religious leaders and people in the pews have expressed support, opposition, or ambivalence about the war itself, while expressing agreement on all sides that we must support those who are serving in the military and fighting in the wars. Find out more in "[Embattled Faith](#)," an article by Neil Shister in the July/August 2003 *UU World*.