

THE STORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WHITENESS CURRICULUM

I think it will be useful to those who use the materials in the Whiteness Curriculum to have some understanding of how the curriculum came into being.

The idea for the Whiteness Curriculum actually started in my mind in the 1960s. I was a minister at the All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington, DC from 1967-1972. During that time I was a member of a Unitarian Universalist organization called FULLBAC which was a group of white people in the Unitarian Universalist Association who were allies and supporters of the Black Unitarian Universalist Caucus (BUUC) during the time of the Empowerment Controversy. The members of BUUC asked us to support them in their efforts to work with African American communities in cities across the nation.

The members of BUUC also said that we white Unitarian Universalists had a responsibility to work with our white brothers and sisters to challenge white supremacy in the institutions of our society. They said we needed to take the lead in dismantling white power and privilege in the core institutions of our country – the corporations, universities, government agencies, schools, and churches. They suggested a good place to start would be the Unitarian Universalist Association. They also said that we needed to take responsibility for working with our white brothers and sisters to address the hold that white superiority has on our hearts and minds. We who were the white members of FULLBAC nodded. Yes that seemed like a very important thing to do.

As a member of FULLBAC, I didn't have a clue about what to do about this call from BUUC. We did not have a clear understanding of what it means to be white. With whiteness as the normal way of doing life, it was hard for us to see the privileges of being white. We had no clear analysis of how white power works in institutions. We had no understanding of how our white supremacist culture shapes our very identities as white people. And we didn't have adequate ways of describing the experiences of white people. If we were to respond to this challenge we would need to develop curriculum and resources as part of our organizing tools.

My point is these are resources that should have been developed in 1969!!!

BUUC called for the funding of the Black Affairs Council (BAC). They requested \$1,000,000 to be paid in \$250,000 increments over four years.

This request was intensely debated at the General Assemblies in Cleveland in 1968 and in Boston in 1969. These General Assemblies voted to support funding. Then the funding was ended at the GA in 1970. When the funding was ended, most of the black Unitarian Universalists and many of their white allies left the movement.

During what has been referred to as the Empowerment Controversy there was an intense three year struggle over issues of leadership, the use of resources, and vision. This has been well documented by Rev. Victor Carpenter in his book The Long Challenge and the Commission on Appraisal study of that period entitled Empowerment: One Denomination's Quest for Racial Justice 1967-1982. . An additional resource for exploring this history is the video "Wilderness Journey: the Struggle for Black Empowerment and Racial Justice within the UUA (1967-1970)."

THE LONG SILENCE:

From 1970 until 1990 there was a period that I call the long silence.

This was not for five years – not for ten years –not even for fifteen years- but for twenty years. During this time we could not talk about issues of racial justice in our faith community as a faith community.

Why couldn't we process what had happened during the Empowerment Controversy or discuss the issues of race and racism in our movement and in our nation? Here are some observations that I have about that time in our history. There were feelings of anger because of the bitterness of the struggle, especially the walk out from the General Assembly in Boston in 1969. There were feelings of guilt and shame over what had happened and our failure to do the right thing. Because we couldn't live out of our moral vision this led to a further downward spiral into a state of moral paralysis.

MINISTRIES IN NASHVILLE AND PHILADELPHIA:

While all of this was going on in our movement, I was serving UU congregations in Nashville and Philadelphia.

In 1972 I went to serve as the minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville in Tennessee. The city was going through desegregation at that time and I discussed with the search committee the importance of working on racial justice issues as an important part of my ministry. I co-led a fair housing group called Woodmont East Neighbors. I was an active leader in an organization working to stop the building of an interstate highway through one of the few integrated neighborhoods in the city. And I organized a protest march against the all white Davis Cup Team from South Africa when they came to Nashville to play the American team. I worked on racial justice issues but I didn't work to dismantle white power in the core institutions nor did I address the issues of white privilege and the internalization of white supremacy.

In 1980 I went to serve at the Unitarian Society of Germantown in Northwest Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Mt. Airy was a fully integrated community. I was a member of the Mt. Airy Neighbors organization. And I served on the Board of the Northwest Interfaith Ministry (NIM). NIM was a consortium of forty Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish congregations that focused on issues of racial justice and community service. Again I worked on racial justice issues but I didn't work to dismantle white power in the core institutions nor did I address the issues of white privilege and the internalization of white supremacy.

I have come to recognize that this is not an either or issue. We need to both work on racial justice issues (housing, education, hunger) that are the results of racism and change the systemic causes of racism.

Though I was doing racial justice work in the communities I served as a minister, I did not provide leadership in the Unitarian Universalist Association for the discussion of the critical issues raised during the time of the Empowerment Controversy or how we might engage those issues right now.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE JOURNEY TOWARD WHOLENESS PROGRAM:

In 1985, denominational leaders formed the Black Concerns Working Group to restart the conversation about racial justice in the UU movement. The Black Concerns Working Group created the Jubilee One model for educating Unitarian Universalists about racism

In 1990, grass roots Unitarian Universalist leaders came to Boston to meet with then President Bill Schulz saying that Unitarian Universalists needed to get reengaged in open discussion of issues related to race and racism in our denomination once again. It was time to end the silence.

At the General Assembly in Calgary (Canada) in 1992 President Bill Schulz and Moderator Natalie Gulbrandsen gave impassioned speeches in favor of our reengaging these issues. The delegates overwhelmingly passed a resolution that we would strive to become a multi-racial faith community. But the question was –what did that really mean? What did Unitarian Universalists need to do to become a multi racial multi cultural community of faith?

A study group- The Racial and Cultural Diversity Task Force - was created to lead the denomination in a process to discuss what it would mean for us to become a truly multi-racial and multi-cultural faith community. A five year discussion took place at all levels of the Association. At every General Assembly there were programs focused on these questions. At the GA in Charlotte in 1993, one whole day was just focused on this conversation. There were forty workshops, speeches, and programs.

After five year of intense dialogue in our congregations and in our General Assemblies about these critical issues the General Assembly in Phoenix in 1997 passed a resolution entitled “Toward an Anti-racist Unitarian Universalist Association” stating that we would become an anti-racist faith community. This is called the Journey Toward Wholeness resolution.

The resolution states, “Therefore be it resolved that the 1997 General assembly urge Unitarian Universalists to examine carefully their own conscious and unconscious racism as participants in a racist society and the effect that racism has on all our lives regardless of color. Be it further resolved that the General Assembly urge the Unitarian Universalist Association, its congregations, and community organizations to develop an ongoing process for the comprehensive institutionalization of anti racism and multiculturalism, understanding that whether or not a group becomes multi racial there is always the opportunity to become anti-racist.”

CRITICAL ISSUES CONCERNING RACE AND RACISM TO BE ADDRESSED BY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS:

During the period between the General Assembly in Calgary in 1992 and the General Assembly in Phoenix in 1997 a dialogue was opened at all levels of the Unitarian Universalist Association regarding issues of race and racism . These important conversations continue today. One of the important areas of discussion was the work that white Unitarian Universalist need to do to end racism in our denomination and in the wider world.

White Unitarian Universalists need to honor the commitment and passion that Unitarian Universalists brought to the struggle for Civil Rights. We need to learn from the painful and complex dynamics of the Empowerment Controversy and grieve the losses from that time. We need to have important discussion about why there was a twenty year period of silence about issues of race and racism in the UU movement following the Empowerment Controversy. And we need to move on to address how racism operates in our faith community and in our wider society today.

There is a historic imbalance of power that results from the colonization of the United States which includes the conquest of Indian and Mexican peoples, the enslavement of African People, and the exclusion of

Asian People. Whites Unitarian Universalists need to work with people of color to address and dismantle the systemic power and privilege that whites have in our denomination and in the other institutions in our society that result from this historic imbalance.

In addition to the institutional dimension of racism, there is also the cultural dimension of racism. White Unitarian Universalists have often expected people of color to change to fit into the culture of our mostly all white congregations. We may expect people of color to speak like white people, worship like white people, and behave like white people. Now there is a clearer sense that those of us who are white are the ones that need to change. Indeed white people and people of color need to change together to create a truly empowering multi-racial and multi-cultural religious community.

White People need to listen to and respond to the real life stories of the pain and marginalization that people of color experience in our religious community and in our society at large. White people also need to learn of the ongoing resistance which people of color are making to the forces of white supremacy. White Unitarian Universalists have real opportunities to be allies to those who are resisting.

Historically, people of color have been on the margins of the Unitarian Universalist Association. White people at the center of the Association need to be in accountable relation with the people of color at the margins and take steps to de-center whiteness. White Unitarian Universalists ought to be to be accountable to people of color concerning the issues that most deeply affect the lives of people of color.

Racism shapes identity leading whites to internalize superiority and people of color to internalize oppression. This is how racism destroys all people - whites and people of color. Developing an anti-racist identity in our personal lives and in our institutions provides an antidote to this demonic system. White Unitarian Universalists need to take responsibility for the internalization of white superiority in their lives and how it manifests itself in our congregations.

THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION CONNECTS WITH CROSSROADS MINISTRY:

The Unitarian Universalist Association needed outside resources to help it address these critical questions. A number of models were reviewed to see what might best help us move forward on the Journey Toward Wholeness.

Leaders in the UUA decided to work with Crossroads Ministry. Crossroads offered a cogent analysis of racism that focused on the power imbalances that lead to racial oppression. Crossroads also brought an organizing process that could support institutional change. Crossroads has since changed its name to Crossroads Anti-racisms Organizing and Training.

Crossroads trainers trained the first five hundred Unitarian Universalists who went through the two and a half day power analysis of racism. Then Crossroads trained fifteen Unitarian Universalists to become trainers of the model. Unitarian Universalist trainers developed a Unitarian Universalist version of the two and a half day analysis training which is called the Jubilee Two.

Crossroads also equipped several UUs with the skills to develop anti-racism teams in districts and congregations.

BILL GARDINER BECOMES A LEADER IN THE JOURNEY TOWARD WHOLENESS INITIATIVE:

I was just coming on the staff of the Unitarian Universalist Association when UU leaders came to President Bill Schulz in 1990 and said we need to reengage the issues of race in our religious community. I was at the meeting where that discussion happened.

There was very intensive organizing that led up to the passage of the resolution in Calgary in 1992. And there was even more intensive organizing during the next five years as people grappled with the critical issues involved. What does that mean? It means that UUA staff people and dozens of volunteers spent thousands of hours, wrote dozens of articles, and organized countless trainings. The Journey Toward Wholeness Initiative didn't just happen. It was organized. And I was one of the staff people deeply involved in that process

I attended numerous power analysis trainings led by Crossroads trainers. And these trainings brought me back to the questions that were raised by the leaders of BUUC during the Empowerment Controversy back in the sixties. But here were some trainers who had actually thought about these issues in some depth.

They had a process for helping those of us who are white to identify white privilege. They provided an analysis of white supremacy and its manifestations. They offered a deep understanding of racial identity development and how those of us who are white are socialized into and internalize white superiority. They also brought people into identity based caucuses to deal with the issues of the internalization of racial superiority (IRS) and the internalization of racial oppression (IRO).

I fully engaged in the Crossroads training process. I really connected with the analysis. I discovered material dealing with the questions raised while I was serving in Washington over twenty years earlier. I found important insights about how to engage in anti-racism work. But more importantly for me here was a way I could answer the call to accountability put forth by my brothers and sisters in BUUC during the Empowerment time. And here was a way to be accountable to people of color in Unitarian Universalism today.

I had an opportunity to become an anti-racism trainer in the Unitarian Universalist movement. In fact I was part of the first class of UUs that were trained that included Robette Dias, Leon Spencer, and Tracey Robinson Harris.

Being an anti-racism trainer requires a person to study racism in depth. Over the past ten years I have read dozens of books about race and racism. And being involved in Crossroads and in forming teams in UU organizations I have been involved in lots of white caucuses. In the caucus and in the reading I have been particularly interested in the issue of whiteness and white identity. Partly I was trying to figure out my own identity as a white male. I felt a need to deepen our discussions of whiteness in the trainings that we do. I wanted to find an adequate response to the question: What are the issues that we white people should be addressing in our caucuses?

The questions: What is the history of white supremacy, where does it come from, how did it evolve in our country, and how does it operate today led to the writing of the paper "Reflections on the History of White Supremacy in the United States." Robette Dias' (Executive Director at Crossroads) work on the history of people of color in the United States led me to ask where are white people in that story.

The paper on the history of white supremacy and Unitarian Universalism came out of the question: Since Unitarian Universalists in the United States trace their history back to their Pilgrim and Puritan roots how has white supremacy impacted on the development of our faith community? What is the interface between the history of white supremacy in our nation and the history of Unitarian Universalism in the United States?

My reflections on “The Emotional Lives of White People” came out of my grappling with my own personal struggle with my white identity and listening to numerous whites talk about their experiences in hundreds of white caucuses.

The piece on “Developing a Positive White Identity” came out of my own personal need to feel positive about my racial identity instead of having it a millstone around my neck.

These personal questions motivated the process of study and reflection which led to the development of the Whiteness Curriculum and the Transforming Our Whiteness training model.

THE FORMATION OF DIVERSE AND REVOLUTIONARY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST MULTICULTURAL MINISTRIES (DRUUMM) AND ALLIES FOR RACIAL EQUITY (ARE)

The work on the Whiteness Curriculum happened in conjunction with the development of Allies for Racial Equity.

DRUUMM was formed shortly after the passage of the Journey Toward Wholeness Resolution in 1997. DRUUMM’s mission statement declares: As people of color mobilized in an anti-racist collective, we unite to:

- Work for self determination, justice, and equal opportunity.
- Empower our various ministries.
- Celebrate our diverse heritages.
- Overcome racism through resistance,
- Transform and enrich Unitarian Universalism through our multi-cultural experiences.

In 2005 leaders of DRUUM requested that white Unitarian Universalist allies form a partner organization to address issues of racism in Unitarian Universalism and the world. In November of 2005 a formal organization called Allies for Racial Equity was created for this purpose.

The Mission of Allies for Racial Equity is to be accountable to people of color in building a movement among white Unitarian Universalists committed to unlearning white privilege/supremacy and to confront racism in all its forms.

ARE is accountable to DRUUMM for building a movement among white Unitarian Universalists to understand white privilege and power and dismantle white supremacy. We do this in the following ways

- Develop anti-racist practice
- Support DRUUMM leadership and DRUUMM initiatives.

- Include diverse perspective committed to recognizing our humanity.
- Cooperatively journey together in mutuality and right relationship toward transformation and wholeness.
- Work with other white Unitarian Universalists as we struggle together to effectively use our anti-racist power to develop anti-racist identity and practice in Unitarian Universalist institutions and congregations and in the wider world.
- Provide resources for a sustainable road to justice built on faith, love, hope, and courage.

In the fall of 2008 an Education Committee was formed to develop training resources and educational curriculum to support these goals. Bill Gardiner and Melissa Carvill-Ziemer are currently the co-chairs of that committee. We have been working to develop the Whiteness Curriculum and the weekend training Transforming Our Whiteness.

A number of people have been very supportive of the development of these resources. The Rev. Tracey Robinson Harris provided institutional support when she was Director of Congregational Services at the Unitarian Universalist Association.

The Rev Melissa Carvill-Ziemer (minister of our congregation in Kent Ohio) has partnered with me in co-chairing the ARE Education Committee, and developing and leading the workshop “Transforming our Whiteness.” Melissa has spent many hours editing and focusing these materials. She has also been willing to share her own racial identity journey and her personal experience of racial identity development.

Diane Martin, Program Manager in Identity Based Ministries at the Unitarian Universalist Association, has provided important support in getting these materials on line.