

SPRING  
2015

# Families

**WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH**



STORY FOR ALL AGES

## WHEN WE GET OUR FREEDOM

Joanne did not know what her grandmother and other adults in Selma, Alabama, were so upset about. In school, Joanne had already learned about “freedom.” She knew that in 1863, one hundred and two years ago, Abraham Lincoln had freed all the slaves. So, why was her grandmother going over to Brown Chapel, day after day, for meetings about fighting for freedom?

At the Methodist chapel, songs were sung and plans were made. There was even training, as if for a war. People were pushed around and insulted, on purpose—so they could practice not pushing back or talking back. This, too, puzzled Joanne. Her grandmother’s freedom fight involved being peaceful, keeping calm, and not fighting back.

One day, Grandma took Joanne to Selma’s downtown to get new shoes. Joanne saw a pair she liked and tried them on. The shoes were too big, so her grandmother asked for a smaller size. But the store clerk said “No.” She demanded that they buy the pair that didn’t fit because, she said, no white person could ever buy them, now that Joanne’s dirty feet had touched them.

They walked by Carter’s Drug Store. Through the window, Joanne could see the clean, shiny lunch counter where children her age were treated to ice

cream served by a waitress. She desperately wanted to sit there, too. “When we get our freedom,” her grandmother said.

That’s when Joanne understood. The adults were fighting for freedom to sit at that counter, to enjoy a nice ice cream on a hot day, to try on shoes without being embarrassed.

Soon Joanne became a Freedom Fighter, too, marching for black voting rights. In February 1965, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to Selma to lead the demonstrators in a peaceful march. When the police began to hit and arrest people, Joanne was one of the children taken to jail for several days.

Surrounding Joanne in jail were familiar people, young and old, many from the George Washington Carver housing project where she lived. She wasn’t scared. Even the children had

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SELMA, 1965

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known they could be arrested. What might come next? Another step toward freedom.

Joanne marched again on March 7, with several hundred people planning to walk more than 50 miles, to Alabama's capital city, Montgomery. But police would not let the marchers over the bridge out of Selma. Attacked by police with weapons, some riding on horses, the marchers scattered. Joanne heard screaming all around her. The next thing she knew, she awoke in a car with her head on her sister's lap. She felt tears drip onto her. She realized it was blood from a wound in her sister's head.

History remembers that march as "Bloody Sunday." The next march to Montgomery, two weeks later, ended with a rousing speech by King at the state capitol. Joanne was part of that march, too.

Joanne Bland still lives in Selma today. As times have changed, she has always found new ways to be a freedom fighter. In 1993, she cofounded the National Voting Rights Museum, where anyone can come to learn about the events that happened in Selma—why the march happened, what it accomplished, and what remains to be done. Now retired from the museum, she guides educational tours along the very streets where she lived the fight for freedom in 1965.

*By Susan Lawrence, with thanks to Joanne Bland for sharing her story.*

## EXPLORING TOGETHER

### THIS ISSUE OFFERS A SNAPSHOT OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, YESTERDAY AND TODAY, BECAUSE THE STRUGGLE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE CONTINUES.

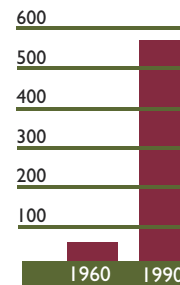
Jimmie Lee had a gun. In Selma, police stopped the march at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. They beat and arrested many, including children. Two weeks later, the marchers tried again, now a much larger group, led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and joined by supporters from all over the world, including many UUs. This time, they reached Montgomery.

Fifty years ago, when today's grandparents were children and teenagers, African American civil rights marchers left Selma, Alabama, on foot for the state capital, Montgomery, to peacefully demand their right to vote. Two weeks earlier, another march had led to the death of a young, black leader, Jimmie Lee Jackson, shot by a police officer who falsely claimed that



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**Black Voters in Alabama**  
(thousands)



### A Vote Is a Way to Have a Say

In 1965, African Americans were at least half the population of Alabama, yet few voted. When black people tried to register to vote, white people stopped them with closed doors, written tests that were impossible to pass, threats, and sometimes violence. African Americans without a vote had no say in the rules they had to live by, and many of these rules (known as Jim Crow laws) hurt black communities.

Unitarian Universalists believe every person should have a say in matters that concern them. In a community—such as your family, a group of friends, your school—you might not always get your way, but you deserve your say! Voting for our choices is the main tool a democracy has to make decisions fair.

The march from Selma to Montgomery directly led Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act—a crucial step toward freedom for black Americans. Now there has been a step back. In 2013, the Supreme Court struck down part of the Act, and voting may become harder for some Americans. The UUA and the UU Service Committee are two groups working to register all who are entitled to vote, make sure all voters know their rights, and change laws that are unfair.

Could your family help out at a voter registration event? Visit the UUA web page about voter rights. Watch the webinar about what UUs can do:

[www.uua.org/liberty/electionreform](http://www.uua.org/liberty/electionreform)





## What Happened in Ferguson Last Year?

Last summer, in Ferguson, Missouri, Michael Brown, a young black man, was shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a white police officer. Michael was 18 years old and was not carrying a weapon. In November, a grand jury decided the police officer would not be charged with a crime. There would not even be a trial.

Since Michael Brown's death, social media has become crowded with troubling stories involving police and the communities they protect. Of course, not every police officer treats black people differently from others. In fact, many police officers are African American, and many African Americans have positive interactions with police. But a pattern of racism should not be ignored.

■ **GATHER with others to share your questions and concerns.**

People may be upset about what happened to Michael Brown for a variety of reasons.

■ **START with your family and friends.**

Listening can be a powerful way to show support. You are never too young or old to do it.

■ **TALK about your hopes and fears.**

What you hear may help you decide what to do next.

**Unitarian Universalists believe that every person matters and it's up to us to work for justice.** We believe all people are connected because we share the same world. That is why it's important to be part of the conversation.

## Racism Hides in Plain Sight

Many people say skin color doesn't matter. Some say having an African American president proves racism no longer exists. However, even though scientists reject the notion of "race," racism still exists, especially institutional racism. Things aren't always fair in our courts of law, our schools, our access to good jobs and homes, and more.

It is not racist to notice the ethnicities of people around you. If your schoolmates have multiple ethnicities, are your teachers also diverse? If you visit a fast food restaurant or a construction site, who are the workers, and who seems to be in charge? Consider the doctors, lawyers, veterinarians, other professionals you know. Are many of them black?

If your community is not very diverse, look in national magazines and network television news to explore where institutional racism can hide. When a photo of a black man appears, what is he shown to be doing? When a white man's photo appears, what is he doing? Track the skin color of people shown to be wealthy, important, or beautiful in magazines. You might take notes, or make a list.

**Careful observation may show you signs of institutional racism. Talk with your family about your findings.**

■ **What do you notice?**

■ **How does this make you feel?**



## Grandmom, Grandpop, What Did You Do in the Fight for Civil Rights?

Ask someone older than 55 where they were on March 7, 1965. If they were old enough to see a TV newscast or hear the conversations of adults around them, they may remember when police attacked civil rights marchers in Selma.

Some folks you talk to may have taken part in the Civil Rights Movement. Ask what they did and how they helped. Some may work on today's campaign against racism. Others may have a story to tell about a civil rights campaign by another group: women, Native Americans, gay and lesbian people, transgender people, immigrants, or people who have disabilities.

**Ask someone you know:**

■ **Where do you see injustice today against African Americans?**

■ **What have you done to confront racism?**

■ **What do you suggest a young person can do?**

## The Williams Family: Then and Now

In 1945, the year Elnora and Erven Williams were both born, in Florida, there were separate schools, churches, and public facilities for whites and blacks. But segregation did not mean black people did without. Their parents made sure Elnora and Erven attended schools with excellent teachers (the couple first met as seventh graders). They had safe places to socialize, like private beaches and Little League. The black community took care of their children.

During the Civil Rights Movement, many young people left safety behind to protest racial discrimination. At 14, Erven took part in sit-ins at local diners. In college, Elnora disobeyed her family and got on the bus to join the Selma march. Each boycotted businesses that refused to serve black people equally with whites.

Children learn what they live, it is said. And so, it is little wonder that both Erven and Elnora joined their voices to the Civil Rights Movement. The adults who raised them had joined unions, knowing a collective voice was stronger than one voice alone. In fact, after Elnora became a teacher and Erven an engineer, times came when each faced an unfair situation at work. Both Erven and Elnora found support and fought back.

The Williamses raised their twins, Frederick and Elandria, with the values that gave their

own lives foundation. The family attended a Baptist church, where the children experienced African American faith community. When the children were nine, coworkers of Erven's invited him to Tennessee Valley UU Church. The family visited and later joined.

In high school, Elandria Williams promoted racial justice as the only youth on the UUA's Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation team. Today, she works for Tennessee's Highlander Center, educating and organizing for social change, and serves on the UUA Presidential Search Committee. Elandria says her family and her faith have taught her what it means to love justice and to be black. Fighting against racism, one might say, was part of the curriculum of her upbringing.

Racism does not just affect people of color. It hurts everyone. Is fighting racism part of your family curriculum?



Left to right, Erven, Elnora, Frederick, and Elandria

- How do you make your child aware of racism?
- How are you equipping your child to help dismantle it?
- What programs can you take part in together to help create the beloved community?

### FAMILIES: WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

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### FIND OUT MORE

- You can visit Brown Chapel, the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and other sites in and around Selma, Alabama, where history was made. Joanne Bland leads a four-hour Civil Rights Journey. Follow on Facebook or email [journeysforthesoul@gmail.com](mailto:journeysforthesoul@gmail.com).
- March 8 is Selma Sunday at many UU congregations. Hundreds of UUs are gathering in Alabama to affirm the voting rights struggle at a fiftieth anniversary conference. Visit [uulivinglegacy.org](http://uulivinglegacy.org) to find out how to join a future Living Legacy Pilgrimage.
- Read a blog post by Gail Forsyth-Vail, "Teaching About Ferguson: Not 'Optional' for White People" on [callandresponse.blogs.uua.org](http://callandresponse.blogs.uua.org) and one by Bree Ervin, "Raising Racially Conscious Kids," on [everydayfeminism.com](http://everydayfeminism.com).
- Black Lives Matter formed in 2012 in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the neighborhood watch volunteer who killed Trayvon Marton, a 17-year-old, unarmed black youth. Discover the mission and passion of contemporary activists for racial justice and see how you can help: [blacklivesmatter.com](http://blacklivesmatter.com).