



A Guide to the Congregational Study Action Issue 2016-2020: The Corruption of Our Democracy



Introduction and Learning Goals

The Congregational Study Action Issue (CSAI) for 2016-2020 on [“The Corruption of Our Democracy”](#) challenges us to reconsider how we understand, participate and engage in democratic living. It is a call to envision our role as a faith community to promote a societal ethos that affirms dignity for all, that takes responsibility for the human role in ecological disaster, and an openness to rethink our use of political power and production of wealth.

This CSAI also asks us to consider how the legal notion of corporate personhood, which grants political participation to corporate entities as citizens, corrodes our cherished democratic process as it opens it up to be unduly influenced by corporate interest. A vibrant democracy depends on the full participation of citizens as caretakers of our shared living, in deep affirmation of our interconnectivity. To safeguard this liberty, we should reflect on the consequences of corporate personhood and the call to take action to eliminate this legal category.

A serious look at the current state of our democracy also demands that we look at how the accumulation of wealth and political power in the history of the United States has been based on structural racism, patriarchy, environmental degradation for economic production, the increased militarization of society, and other oppressions. From the very founding of the United States wealth was created from the seizure of land from indigenous peoples who were forcibly removed and exterminated, the enslavement of Africans, and the expropriation of labor from indentured servants, laborers, and immigrants.

Alongside the rise and consolidation of the property owning class and escalating inequality there has also always been the resistance of oppressed people fighting for freedom, rights, and equity. Without a narrative that confronts the frauds of meritocracy and other myths that underlie American democracy, any efforts to create a true democracy will be limited at best, and at worst will continue to perpetuate systems of oppression. While we affirm that racialized capitalism and white supremacy have heavily shaped our political system, we also recognize and celebrate progressive and revolutionary people’s movements that have fought for the expansion of democracy and the ability to gain social reforms and social justice and protect our natural resources.

This CSAI Guide on “The Corruption of Our Democracy” invites us to learn a new narrative and work to create a truly inclusive democracy that challenges the exploitation of peoples and natural resources by corporate and political power at the expense of the common good and our collective future. It is a call to live into what Unitarian theologian Rev. James Luther Adams called “the prophet-hood of all believers.”

The CSAI proposal asks if a moral political revolution is needed to address the corruption of our democracy. Furthermore, it also suggests a legislative proposal - the reversal of the decision granting personhood to corporations. This may take the radical political step of adopting the proposal of a constitutional amendment. Let us explore the question and examine the possible steps needed to get there.

Grounding in Unitarian Universalism

A society’s form of government is more than how it organizes itself as a political community. It is also an account of the ruling values. Who participates, how, and to what extent are not only issues of politics, but matters of morality, and also an expression of matters of ultimate concern, of matters of faith. As we begin this conversation, let us begin with grounding our work together by committing ourselves to reflect on what Rev. Williams Barber II, leader of the Forward Together Moral Mondays Movement, said: “The promise of democracy is a question of faith.” How we understand our commitment to democratic living as a question of faith will determine how we work towards transforming the corruption of our democracy.

In recent years, we Unitarian Universalists have devoted our energies, resources of time and finances, and committed ourselves to varying degrees as individuals, congregations, and communities to address issues of escalating inequality, racial justice, voting rights, immigration, reproductive justice, marriage equality, climate change, gun violence, and more. Living out of our shared Seven Principles means that these are issues of major moral concerns and therefore, issues that require a faith-full response. Working together to strengthen our democracy can aggregate our ability to put our faith into action and build movements for justice.

Study Action Guide Format

In this study action guide, we turn our attention to a significant shift in our political community. This shift is represented by the granting of expanded legal rights and powers to corporations, special interests such as the National Rifle

Association, as well as to unions, non-profit corporations, and other artificial entities. Whereas the pressure of lobbying bodies has always been an issue of concern, the granting of personhood to corporations now makes it a possibility that money may speak as a political actor in our democracy. The extension of constitutional protections as citizens to corporate bodies with the ability to use money as free speech will undoubtedly transform our political community; it will dilute the power of citizens' participation with the flooding of corporate money as a political voice.

In the face of this possibility, could passage of an amendment establishing that only human beings, not corporations, unions and other artificial entities, have constitutional rights, and that money is not free speech, contribute to a more fully democratic society? Should we, as engaged citizens and as a religious community become concerned with the ways in which Supreme Court decisions over the past two hundred years created this "legal fiction," that corporate entities should count as people? What resources do our Unitarian Universalist Principles provide to address this threat? Is it time to be emboldened by our shared principle affirming the right of conscience and the use of democratic processes in our congregations and society at large? Do we need to commit ourselves to a moral political revolution that affirms the protection of voting rights, opposes gerrymandering, resists tactics of voting intimidation, and calls for changes in campaign financing towards a goal of a public transparency and the achievement of social justice?

The short film, [Legalize Democracy](#) (30 minutes) provides a good framework for addressing the questions raised by the Congregational Study Action Issue on 'The Corruption of Our Democracy.'

- Watch the film *Legalize Democracy* (Produced by Move to Amend, 2013)
- Use this Study Action Discussion Guide with Supplemental Readings
- Ask participants to read the Guide beforehand (at least Introduction and Learning Goals on pp. 2-4) and print out and bring to sessions if possible. (Have a few extra on hand for those who cannot or who forget.)
- Or feel free to use Word Version to create Handouts

A variety of formats can be used to best suit your setting from holding one 2 hour and one 1 hour session to holding three 1 hour sessions or three 1 hour sessions and one follow-up action session.

Components:

- Opening (15 – 20 minutes).....p. 5
- Film Showing (30 minutes)
- Discussion: 7 Short Supplemental Readings and Sets of Discussion Questions (15-20 minutes each).....pp. 7-18
 - 1: Past, Present & Future of Democracy in the United States
 - 2: History of Corporate Influence on US Democracy
 - 3: History of Structural Racism on US Democracy
 - 4: History of People’s Movements and US Democracy
 - 5: The Present Moment & the Fight for Our Future
 - 6: Beyond the Amendment: Building a Multiracial Movement for Democracy
 - 7: Building a Multiracial Movement for Democracy & Dismantling Structural Racism
- Final Session on Strategies & Action Steps (could be 30-60 minutes).p. 18
- Resources & Appendix.....p. 20

Note to facilitators: If people are in small groups, facilitators may choose to gather in all together halfway through the discussion and/or at the end for people to share a few insights to the whole group. (If so, allow 10-15 minutes)

A separate follow-up session is recommended for the section on Strategies and Action Steps to move from Study to Action, however ideas can be pointed out in the previous session.

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading/Introductions (10 minutes)

Welcome participants, light the chalice, and read:

The aspiration that democratic living fuels is a desire to shape our world through justice. Unitarian Universalists have the grounding, ability, and opportunity to make a difference in fulfilling the promise of democracy. In our 5th Principle we affirm the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large. Our history includes working to expand democratic participation for those originally excluded. We fought for the enfranchisement of former slaves after the abolition of slavery. We took part in the women’s suffrage movement. We marched for the expansion of citizenship

protections and full participation of Black people during the civil rights era. We have been agents of change in the unconcluded work of immigration reform. We are joining in the struggle to end the New Jim Crow and mass incarceration. We affirm the full restoration of former felons' voting rights and we oppose voter suppression. As a faith community we work for the protection and expansion of voting rights, and resist corporate influence in our democratic process. We do this to build Beloved Community. We do this as an act of faith.

(Optional) In April 2016, over 500 UUs participated in the national Democracy Spring and Democracy Awakening actions. **Show [UUs at Democracy Awakening Video](#)** (5 minutes)

Introductions: Invite each person to introduce themselves and say one sentence about why they came to this discussion group.

Creating a Covenant: (5 minutes) Post these covenant points on newsprint. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement.

We promise to:

- speak from our own experiences and perspectives
- listen respectfully to the experiences and perspectives of other people
- pay attention to the group process, making sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and to listen.
- use this time as an opportunity for ethical, religious and spiritual discernment.
- listen to one another for understanding rather than to debate, even when the conversation touches on politics or public policy.

Show [Legalize Democracy](#) (30 minutes)

Note: Be sure to download videos to laptop before the session to avoid buffering from viewing directly from the internet. Test speakers and equipment beforehand.

Discussion Facilitation: If you have a large group attending, have people count off 1 through 3 or 4 to divide into smaller groups. Or have people speak in pairs. (For variety, groups could be changed halfway through on a break, e.g. send half of the 1s to group 2, half of the 2s to group 3, and half of the 3s to group 1, etc. Pairs could first turn to their left, then to their right. Also some questions can be done in pairs (perhaps the first one) and others in groups.

Supplemental Reading 1: Past, Present & Future of Democracy in the United States

Framing: *Have participants read on their own or facilitator can read out loud.*

The political ethos of the United States rests on the belief that its citizens, as The People, are the seat of political power. This view is enshrined in our most sacred political text, the U.S. Constitution. This is expressed in the Preamble to the Constitution where we read the following words: *"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, ensure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."* In this view the state of our Union, the nature of our Justice, and Tranquility in society depends on the People holding up their role as engaged citizens. In spite of this affirmation, the beginning of our democratic experiment was also marked by exclusionary practices. Only landed white men, men of influence and high status, participated in the democratic process. Poor communities, women, enslaved people, and indigenous peoples were excluded from political participation. Furthermore, as capitalist economics became the dominant growth ideology, special interest groups and corporations have sought to directly influence policies that deregulate government oversight.

A major premise of the film *Legalize Democracy* is that the history of the U.S. up to the present is one in which corporations have achieved greater influence, exert increasing control of the political process, and thus, the people are losing their influence to determine policy through our democratic structures. The film begins by asking do the people govern? Are we able to meaningfully participate in the legislative process and address issues of wages, health care, environment, wars and foreign policy? Or is increasing corporate profits, and their influence in the political process, now the governing principle? Speakers raise several issues. Among them they talk about how healthcare should not be decided by pharmaceutical companies and insurers. They also discuss the troubling dynamics that private prison corporations invested in profiting from the increase in prison population, bring pressure to determine that facilities be filled to capacity; thus pushing for more and harsher criminal legislation. While voter suppression increases, voters experience an increase of corporate ownership and control of their daily life choices.

First Impressions Discussion Questions: *Read from Guide or Post on Newsprint.*

- Do you agree with the film's premise that as corporate influence encroaches upon the political system, there is less opportunity for people to have meaningful control of our democracy?
- Are there areas in your life where you see corporations having a greater influence in your and your community's choices? Where do you and 'the people' have less influence?
- If you do not agree, how do you view the balance between corporate and individual and community participation in our democracy? Should each one of these bodies have a similar political voice? What is optimal for a fair, just, and democratic society in your view?

Supplemental Reading 2: History of Corporate Influence on US Democracy

Framing: *Have participants read on their own or facilitator can read out loud.*

A central question the film lifts up is, who, according to our laws and culture, gets to be considered a person? It argues that the law creates legal personhood and movements create law and change culture. Laws and cultural practices expose how power operates in a society. Thus, as the construct of personhood vests rights and privileges to certain bodies it also can potentially, either politically or in practice, limit the participation of others.

A recap from the film:

An 1819 Supreme Court ruling gave corporations standing within the Constitution. An 1886 decision ruled that private corporations have the same 14th Amendment rights as human beings. Further rulings protect corporations and makes it much more difficult to hold them accountable. Corporations can sue for future profits lost which has had a chilling effect.

1976, in Buckley vs. Valeo, SCOTUS ruled that spending money to influence elections is constitutionally protected under the First Amendment. In effect saying that money is speech.

In 2010 Citizens United vs. Federal Elections Commission, SCOTUS ruled that corporations have the rights of people.

From [Faithful Democracy](#):

“In *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that there would be no limit on the amount that corporations could spend on political advertising. This case gave corporations the same rights as individuals. Then in the subsequent *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*, the Supreme Court overturned limits for individuals on aggregate federal campaign donations. The ruling noted that the only legitimate rationale for limiting campaign spending is to prevent quid pro quo corruption—essentially, the crime of bribery. But the problem of big money dominating our elections is far more profound than the narrowly defined crime of bribery. The potential flood of spending on national elections threatens the foundation of our democracy.” -- Rev. Leslie Woods

Move to Amend movement declares that corporations are not people and money is not speech and that it is not enough to only oppose the Citizens United ruling. They claim that challenging corporate personhood is necessary to really unfetter democracy. They ask, how much better was our democracy before Citizens United? They argue that corporate constitutional rights need to be overturned because outsized influence of corporations on legislators keeps reform and change from happening.

In, [“How corporations became ‘persons’”](#) (UU World, May/June 2003), former UU World Editor Tom Stites writes:

Corporations gained personhood through aggressive court maneuvers culminating in an 1886 Supreme Court case called *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific*. Until then, only We the People were protected by the Bill of Rights, and the governments the people elected could regulate corporations as they wished. But with personhood, corporations steadily gained ways to weaken government restraints on their behavior—and on their growth. After steady progress over the decades, they made huge strides in the 1970s through Supreme Court rulings that awarded them Fourth Amendment safeguards against warrantless regulatory searches, Fifth Amendment double jeopardy protection, and the Sixth Amendment right to trial by jury. These blunted the impact of the Clean Air Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration Act, and the Consumer Product Safety Act, which were enacted to protect workers, consumers, and the environment.

They also won court battles that awarded them First Amendment guarantees of political speech, commercial speech, and the negative free speech right not to be associated with the speech of others. On the surface, when the big corporations and We the People have the same rights, they are equal, and the playing field is level. But disparities of scale tip the field toward the corporations at a steep pitch. If a nation-sized corporation with its huge treasury and squadrons of lawyers wants to exercise its free speech rights in a shouting match with a citizen who is exercising her or his free speech rights, can this be a fair fight?

Discussion Questions: *Read from guide or facilitator can read and/or post on newsprint.*

- Does the history presented in the film align with your understanding of US history? Was this history taught to you in school?
- What have you read or learned that supports this analysis of the increasing influence and power of corporations? Have there been times when corporations had less influence?

Supplemental Reading 3: History of Structural Racism on US Democracy

Framing: *Have participants read on their own or facilitator can read out loud:*

Legalize Democracy documents how while corporations' rights were being expanded, people's rights were limited by how race and racism were constructed in the US through the law. Those laws informed our culture in much the same way that corporate rights have been constructed through the law to ensure the rule of the wealthy minority over the majority. An understanding of how our culture reinforces and legitimizes that lack of democracy is required.

A recap from the film:

Right from the beginning Article 4 of the Constitution defined people as property in order to protect the institution of slavery. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced indigenous communities from their homelands freeing up over 25 million acres of land for white settlers. In 1854 *People vs. Hall*, non-whites were barred from testifying in court. The 1857 *Dred Scott* decision allowed taxation of free black people with no rights of citizenship. In the 1862 Emancipation Proclamation in the District of Columbia, enslaved people were freed, but former slave owners

were reimbursed, receiving over \$1 million in reparations for lost property. The 1862 Homestead Act led to 50 million acres of indigenous peoples lands being violently seized (in violation of treaties) and distributed to white settlers only at a low cost and 100 million acres were given free to railroad developers. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act banned immigration of Chinese workers. The 1924 Johnson Reed Act created an immigration quota system based on national origin favoring 'Nordic' immigrants over the "inferior" races of Asia and Eastern and Southern Europe. The 1934 National Housing Act created a Federal Housing Authority to provide loans and subsidies for homeownership but discriminated against non-whites and investment in non-white communities through a process known as redlining. The 1942 Executive Order forced 111,000 Japanese into concentration camps. The War on Drugs created by President Richard Nixon created criminalization and mass incarceration that continues through to today.

An important fact not addressed by the film is that the US Constitution considered enslaved people to be 3/5ths of a person. In [Federalist Papers, #54](#)--, James Madison, writing as 'Plubius' makes a case as to how and in what manner to count the slave population. This entered into the Constitution as the 3/5ths clause. This also had ramifications on elections as enslaved people were counted as such by the Electoral College even though they, of course, could not vote. Thomas Jefferson defeated President John Adams in the 1800 presidential election, even though he received fewer actual votes. His margin of victory was the 12 votes granted him by the three-fifths representation of slaves in Congressional delegations and the Electoral College. See [Thomas Jefferson, the 'Negro President' Chronicle of Founding Father's Three-Fifths Slave Vote Victory](#) by Garry Wills. Today, prison populations are counted in the census, leading to gerrymandering in districts with large prisons, while people in prison cannot vote.

Discussion Questions: *Read from guide or post on newspaper.*

- Does the history presented in the film align with your understanding of US history?
- What have you read or learned that supports this analysis of structural racism in democracy in the US--that corporations are treated as persons, while people of color have their very humanity denied?
- How does it make you feel? What does your faith have to say about this?

Supplemental Reading 4: History of People's Movements and US Democracy

Framing: *Have participants read on their own or facilitator can read out loud:*

A recap from the film: *"It is possible to read the history of this country as one long struggle to extend the liberties established in our constitution to everyone in America."—Molly Ivins*

Every social movement that has recognized that the system is flawed realizes that it is time for the people to step in when the system is out of balance. People's movements come forward to correct the situation and make the priorities about the people and human rights. This history is about when people come together and rise up to change laws and change the culture.

1791—The first 10 constitutional amendments adopted to protect "We the People" (defined as white male property owners) against government excesses.

1865 – Slavery abolished

1866 – Extended the rights of free Black people

1868 – 14th Amendment – Black males granted equal protection under the law

1870 – 15th Amendment – Black males granted the right to vote

1886 – Major campaign for the 8 hour work day

1913 – US Senate is now elected by the people instead of by state legislatures

1920 – 19th Amendment – women get the right to vote

1930s--1940s – FDR Administration – Economic Bill of Rights* (not passed)

1954 – Brown vs. Board of Education – schools may no longer be segregated

1960s – Civil rights, voting rights, anti-discrimination laws – Jim Crow overturned

1971 – 26th Amendment – 18 year olds get the vote

1973 – Roe v. Wade – abortion is legalized – a woman's right to privacy is protected

*President Franklin Roosevelt proposed an Economic Bill of Rights in his State of the Union address on January 11, 1944. It called for the rights, regardless of race or creed, to a useful and remunerative job, the right to earn enough to provide adequate food, clothing and recreation, the right of every farmer to raise and sell products at rate of return for a decent living, for small and large businesses to trade in an environment free of monopolies, the right of every family to a decent home, the right to adequate medical care, and adequate protection of economic fears from old age, sickness and unemployment, and the right to a good education. However, it was never passed.

Discussion Questions: *Read from guide or post on newsprint.*

- What is missing from this history? What other people's movements changed laws and culture? For example the union struggles in the 1930s that won many labor reforms and the right to organize (but excluded domestic and farm workers leaving Black workers in the South out)? Are there others?
- What are some movements that have influenced you or that you were involved in? How have racial dynamics shaped political participation in various movements?

Supplemental Reading 5: The Present Moment & the Fight for Our Future

Framing: *Have participants read on their own or facilitator can read out loud.*

Legalize Democracy concludes by asking: What now? Can the people govern rather than be ruled by the wealthy? Why are we not getting the changes we want? And argues that:

- Democracy is not working for the people.
- The Move to Amend Campaign that seeks to get a constitutional amendment passed would "break the grip of unequal power" and stipulate that "Money is not political speech."
- Move to Amend must succeed or corporations will continue to call the shots.

And, that beyond a constitutional amendment, what's needed is:

- A new way of understanding what democracy is and how our economic systems need to be reconstructed.
- Social, political, and economic change, codified by law, to make the cultural shift to a peaceful, sustainable world.

The Move to Amend Campaign

The Move to Amend Campaign declares that corporations are not people and money is not speech and that it is not enough to only oppose and overturn the Citizens United ruling. They claim that challenging corporate personhood is necessary to really unfetter democracy and this can best be done by amending the Constitution. They ask, how much better was our democracy before Citizens United? They argue that corporate constitutional rights need to be overturned because the outsized influence of corporations on legislators keeps reform and change from happening.

To amend the Constitution, an amendment has to be proposed either by a 2/3 vote of both houses of Congress, or else by a constitutional convention convened when the legislatures of 2/3 of the states so request. The amendment has to be ratified either by the legislatures of 3/4 of the states, or by conventions in 3/4 of the states, depending on which means of ratification Congress proposes.

All of the amendments to the Constitution, of which there are now 27, were proposed by Congress, and all but one were ratified by state legislatures. The convention route has never been used for proposing an amendment, and was used only once for ratifying an amendment (the 21st, which eliminated Prohibition). (See [Move to Amend](#))

Move to Amend's 'We the People Amendment' has 23 sponsors from 15 states. [Introduced in Congress on April 28, 2015 as House Joint Resolution 48](#) the "We the People Amendment" proposal reads:

Section 1. [Artificial Entities Such as Corporations Do Not Have Constitutional Rights]

The rights protected by the Constitution of the United States are the rights of natural persons only.

Artificial entities established by the laws of any State, the United States, or any foreign state shall have no rights under this Constitution and are subject to regulation by the People, through Federal, State, or local law.

The privileges of artificial entities shall be determined by the People, through Federal, State, or local law, and shall not be construed to be inherent or inalienable.

Section 2. [Money is Not Free Speech]

Federal, State, and local government shall regulate, limit, or prohibit contributions and expenditures, including a candidate's own contributions and expenditures, to ensure that all citizens, regardless of their economic status, have access to the political process, and that no person gains, as a result of their money, substantially more access or ability to influence in any way the election of any candidate for public office or any ballot measure.

Federal, State, and local government shall require that any permissible contributions and expenditures be publicly disclosed.

The judiciary shall not construe the spending of money to influence elections to be speech under the First Amendment.

Discussion Questions: *Read from guide or post on newsprint.*

- Do you think that the Constitution should be amended?
- If so, do you think it is possible?
- Do you believe that Unitarian Universalists should support the campaign?

In “Don’t Blame Corporate Personhood,” <http://prospect.org/article/dont-blame-corporate-personhood> (American Prospect, April 16, 2012), Gary Epps argues that the focus needs to be on publicly subsidized campaign finance reform and a nuanced interpretation of the First Amendment right to free speech, not corporate personhood. What do you think of Epps’ conclusions?

Supplemental Reading 6: Beyond the Amendment: Building a Multiracial Movement for Democracy

Framing: *Have participants read on their own or facilitator can read out loud.*

The film *Legalize Democracy* also calls for work beyond the amendment to create a multiracial multiethnic democracy movement in the U.S. The film was made after the Occupy movement arose. Since then we have seen the rise of movements led by people of color.

The Movement for Black Lives Platform identifies six areas of demands that all relate to economic control and democracy: End the War on Black People, Reparations, Invest-Divest, Economic Justice, Community Control, and Political Power. The Platform opens with the statement:

“Black humanity and dignity requires Black political will and power. Despite constant exploitation and perpetual oppression, Black people have bravely and brilliantly been the driving force pushing the U.S. towards the ideals it articulates but has never achieved. In recent years we have taken to the streets, launched massive campaigns, and impacted elections, but our elected leaders have failed to address the legitimate demands of our Movement. We can no longer wait.”

<https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/>

Mijente is a new Latinx movement that engages in organizing, advocacy, and electoral work and fights racial profiling and for migrant’s right to remain. See <http://mijente.net/>.

Indigenous People’s Movements are gaining strength in the US as seen by the [Standing Rock Sioux](#) Tribe’s fight to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline and the growth of the [Indigenous Environmental Network](#).

Discussion Questions: *Read from guide or post on newsprint.*

- What do the Movement for Black Lives, Latinx, and Indigenous People’s movements have to say about economic control and democracy? What are their strategies? Do they align with the Move to Amend campaign?
- Do you agree that in order to gain racial, climate, economic, gender and LGBTQ justice we need to come together to end the corruption of our democracy?
- Are there opportunities to create what David Cobb, from the Move to Amend National Leadership Team, calls ‘a sweet spot of solidarity’?

Supplemental Reading 7: Building a Multiracial Movement for Democracy & Dismantling Structural Racism

Can democracy be more than an abstract ideal, when tens of millions of its citizens feel alienated and marginalized by what have become the “normal” and routine consequences of American racialization in daily life? –Manning Marable

In 2001, Dr. Manning Marable, author of *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* and many other works, wrote:

From the vantage point of people of color, and especially Americans of African descent, our collective histories and experiences of interaction with the white majority have been largely defined around a series of oppressive institutions and

practices. While laws have changed regarding the treatment of racialized minorities over the years, the deep structure of white prejudice, power and privilege which has formed the undemocratic foundation of most human interactions has not fundamentally been altered. In order for American democracy finally to become a reality for all of its citizens, we must, first, understand historically how and why these deep structures of racial inequality came into being, and how they were most decisively expressed in the daily lives and life chances of minorities and whites alike.

The fundamental problem for the viability of American democracy, therefore, may be the problem of what can be termed “structural racism”: whether the majority of American people, its leaders, political organizations and institutions, have the capacity and vision to dismantle the complex structural barriers which severely curtail the democratic rights and socio-economic opportunities of millions of their fellow citizens who are African American, Latino, American Indian, Arab American and Asian and Pacific Island Americans.

Does this nation possess the political courage to affirm these truths as self-evident, that all citizens regardless of race are born with certain unalienable rights, and that first among these is the right to exist as human beings? Can democracy be more than an abstract ideal, when tens of millions of its citizens feel alienated and marginalized by what have become the “normal” and routine consequences of American racialization in daily life?

I believe that a multicultural democracy can be achieved within American public life: a civil society that treats every citizen with fairness and respect, a political culture that encourages the broadest possible involvement and participation in decision-making processes of all racialized groups and social classes, and a criminal justice system that does not routinely stigmatize entire classes of individuals solely due to their physical appearance. The difficult political and moral challenge is to transform those lofty ideals into a democratic movement that has the capacity to transform the real structure of racial power in society.

--Marable, Manning. [“Structural Racism and American Democracy: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Racism & Public Policy Conference Paper, Durban, South Africa, Sept. 3-5, 2001”](#) (We recommend reading the full article posted here, 15 pages.)

Concluding Discussion Questions: Have participants read or facilitator can read out loud and/or post on newsprint.

- Do you agree with the analysis presented in the film about the owning class and that our economic system needs to be reconstructed?
- Could we eliminate racism, sexism, and oppression and halt climate change if we built a multiracial democracy?
- Dr. Marable posits that to build a multiracial democracy we must dismantle structural racism. Can we do these simultaneously?

Final Session on Strategies and Actions:

Framing: Have participants read or facilitator can read out loud.

The Move to Amend Campaign is one part of the democracy movement. Can a democracy movement bring all the various movements together? Or do all the movements just need to work for democracy as part of their broader missions? Is everyone at the table in the Move to Amend movement? Who is the leadership? Does the movement center people of color? What are the roles of other democracy movements such as Democracy Awakening and Democracy Spring and the Forward Together Moral Monday movement? How can our faith communities play a positive role in building a multiracial democracy?

Discuss the strategies and actions you and your congregation or organization might take to respond to the corruption of our democracy and the need to build a multiracial movement for justice and democracy. Discuss where you see opportunities, including for partnerships, and what would be the best fit for you.

Some recommended strategies and possible action steps are posted below.

Strategies and Action Steps:

Build a multiracial democracy movement for justice. Whatever justice initiatives and campaigns you are working on, build multi-racial democracy and center the leadership of people of color.

Engage in radical-truth telling and intersectional organizing. Whether from the pulpit or a congregational organizing meeting or everyday conversations, we need to name the frauds that keep the status quo in place and act from the understanding that we are all connected.

2016 and Mid-Term Elections:

Voter Registration and Get out the Vote among infrequent voters and historically disenfranchised communities. Both are ways to fight voter suppression. Join the PICO We Vote Together Campaign and other campaigns. See www.uua.org/votingrights for partner groups and more information.

Protect the Elections: Sign up at [Election Protection](#) and click on 'Volunteer.'

Join [Move to Amend](#) to learn how to build toward the adoption of a Constitutional Amendment -- from congregational and city and town resolutions to action by state legislatures and support at the federal level. The Unitarian Universalist Association is an endorsing organization, along with UUs for a Just Economic Community, and dozens of UU congregations.

Join the [Move to Amend Interfaith Caucus](#). The website offers a wealth of resources. Calls are held monthly, every third Wednesday at noon EST.

Sign the [Higher Ground Moral Declaration](#) and connect with the Moral Revival Movement.

Get Ready for the 2020 Census: Former censuses have led to gerrymandering and redistricting. How can we prepare for the 2020 census to redistrict in favor of the people? Support the [Census Project](#) and other initiatives that make sure everyone is counted.

What partnerships do you already have in place, what alliances need to be made? How can you strengthen and connect work already underway?

Resources:

Organizations & Movements

Black Lives Matter (<http://blacklivesmatter.com/>) for building the Black liberation movement.

[Democracy Awakening](#) for advocacy and legislation.

[Democracy Spring](#) for direct action and movement building.

[Faithful Democracy--Money Out of Politics Campaign](#) for moral grounding and resources on how concerns from climate justice, gun violence, immigrant justice, criminal justice reform and more connect to the money out of politics campaign.

[Indigenous Environmental Network](#) formed by grassroots Indigenous peoples to address environmental and economic justice issues. They are supporting the [Standing Rock Sioux](#) Tribe's fight to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline.

[Mijente](#) for Latinx movement building that is also pro-Black, pro-woman, pro-queer, pro-poor 'because our community is all that and more.'

[The Moral Revival](#): Time for a Revolution of Values. A multi-faith effort led by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, to build a fusion coalition and a new justice movement.

[Standing on the Side of Love](#) – A public advocacy campaign of the Unitarian Universalist Association to harness the power of love to stop oppression.

Unitarian Universalist Association:

- [Racial Justice](#)
- [Voting Rights](#)
- [Social and Environmental Justice](#)
- [Social Witness Process](#)

[UU State Actions Networks](#) - now in over 25 states.

[We Say Enough! Campaign](#) - A multi-faith, multi-racial campaign focused on radical truth-telling about structural racism and changing the conditions that are keeping people and places locked up, locked out, and left behind.

Resources for Adult Religious Education, Articles & Books:

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- Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne (2015) *An Indigenous People's History of the United States*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. [Companion Discussion Guide](#).
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Gitin, M. (2014). *This bright light of ours: Stories from the 1965 voting rights fight*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press.
- Glaude, E. S. (2016). *Democracy in Black: How race still enslaves the American soul*.
- May, G. (2015). *Bending toward justice: The Voting Rights Act and the transformation of American democracy*.
- Marable, Manning (2001) [Structural Racism and American Democracy: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives](#). United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Racism & Public Policy Conference Paper, Durban, South Africa, Sept. 3-5, 2001.
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- Mayer, Jane. (2016) *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*. Doubleday.
- McDonald, L. (2010). *American Indians and the fight for equal voting rights*. Norman, Okla: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Roth, Zachary. (2016) *The Great Suppression: Voting Rights, Corporate Cash, and the Conservative Assault on Democracy*. Penguin Random House.
- Shiva, V. (2005). *Earth democracy: Justice, sustainability, and peace*. Cambridge, Mass: South End Press.
- Stites, Tom. "How corporations became 'persons'" <http://www.uuworld.org/articles/how-corporations-became-persons> May/June 2003, UU World.
- Wills, Gary. [Thomas Jefferson, the 'Negro President' Chronicle of Founding Father's Three-Fifths Slave Vote Victory](#) (and audio)
- Zinn, Howard. (1980; Updated in 2005). *A People's History of the United States*. Harper Collins.

Resources for Youth

- Cohen, C. J. (2012). Democracy remixed: Black youth and the future of American politics. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lowery, L. B., Leacock, E., Buckley, S. W., & Loughran, P. J. (2015). Turning 15 on the road to freedom: My story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights March.
- [The Movement for Black Lives](#)
- Teaching A People's History: [Zinn Education Project](#).

Resources for Children

- Bandy, M. S., Stein, E., & Ransome, J. (2015). Granddaddy's turn: A journey to the ballot box.
- Berlak, Ann, Daniel Camacho, and José Antonio Galloso. 2015. Joelito's big decision = La gran decisión de Joelito.
- Fritz, J., & DiSalvo, D. A. (1995). You want women to vote, Lizzie Stanton?. New York: Putnam's.
- Pinkney, A. D., & Pinkney, J. B. (2010). Sit-in: How four friends stood up by sitting down. New York: Little, Brown and Company.
- Robbins, Dean, Sean Qualls, and Selina Alko. 2016. Two friends: Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass.
- Tonatiuh, D. (2014). Separate is never equal: Sylvia Mendez & her family's fight for desegregation.
- Weatherford, C. B., & Lagarrigue, J. (2005). Freedom on the menu: The Greensboro sit-ins. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.
- Winter, Jonah, and Shane Evans. 2015. Lillian's right to vote: a celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. New York: Schwartz & Wade Books.

Worship Resources

- [Inspiring 5 minute video UUs at Democracy Awakening](#) - (Can also be found on www.uua.org/votingrights page)
- [Moral Revival Higher Ground Moral Declaration](#)
- [Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 1966 Ware Lecture](#)
- [Reading: James Luther Adams on the Prophetic Liberal Church](#)
- [UUA Worship Web](#)

Films & Videos

- [Films for Congregational-Community Movie/Discussion Nights](#)
- [End Corporate Rule, Legalize Democracy: From the beginning, who could vote: \(58 minutes\)](#)
- [Humorous Look at Redistricting: Why we need to pay attention, and work toward nonpartisan redistricting in the states](#)
- [Legalize Democracy is available on DVD for purchase-- \\$10-\\$25 sliding scale](#)
- [Money, Corporations, and Democracy: Moral and Religious Perspectives. Multi-faith Panel at Harvard Divinity School, October 2016](#)
- [The Story of Citizens United v FEC 2011 \(9 mins\)](#)

See Facebook Pages & Groups for:

- [Move to Amend UUs](#)
- [UUs Forward Together: Voting Rights & the Mass Moral Movement](#)
- [Connect with others in Move to Amend](#)

APPENDIX: Recommended Process for Move to Amend from UU Justice Florida Action Network

- [Consider passage of a Congregational Resolution](#)
- Encourage your City Council to pass a resolution for Move to Amend.
- Encourage your County Commission to pass a resolution for Move to Amend. [See where others have done so](#)
- Encourage your City or County Commission or State legislature to put a ballot initiative on the ballot, so all voters can vote on it. This is the most effective way of reaching the public. Alachua County, Florida did this in 2014, with 72% of voters of all political parties voting in favor. Several states and numerous cities have passed ballot initiatives.
- See other steps you can take at www.movetoamend.org to get candidates and elected officials to “Pledge to Amend”. We must build grassroots support and the support of our elected officials to bring this to fruition.
- [Ask your U.S. Representative to Co-Sponsor HJR 4y, the “We the People Amendment”](#)

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