

Guide to Race Based Affinity Groups

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How to Use This Document

This is a list of resources, activities, and prompts to facilitate race-based affinity groups as part of a workshop series, conference, or other gathering. If you have an hour or less, just utilize the introduction activities.

If you have 1-3 hours with your group, combine the introduction and ritual activities. If you have more than three hours together, then you may have time to implement the bonding activities and conversations. It is advisable to spend more time fully engaged in one section, rather than attempt to cover all the sections with limited time.

Theological Framing

What is the purpose of providing racial identity space and programming?

Gathering around shared identity is a powerful part of our Unitarian Universalist tradition, from women gathering in conscious raising groups to youth leading vibrant circle worship to Black UUs calling for transformative shifts. Identity-based space is a practice of Unitarian Universalist communities seeking to address the particular spiritual, community, and justice needs of specific identity-groups. Examples include Youth Caucus at General Assembly, campus ministries, Transgender Religious professional UUs Together (TRUUST) gatherings, and the Black Lives of UU (BLUU) convenings.

The purpose of gathering in racial affinity groups is not to force segregation, but rather to create safe and brave space where people can express their fears, pain and hopes without bystanders, so when they re-enter mixed identity spaces it will be with greater self-awareness, less self-judgment, and stronger confidence.

“Identity space can be used to:

- Support processing and learning when people in cross-cultural community respond differently to workshops and trainings.
 - Express strong emotions when groups respond differently to shared experiences because of specific identity diversity within the group. (Responses include tension, conflict, and sadness.)
 - Deepen spiritual growth around themes of history, ancestry, or cultural identity.
 - Connect with a community that shares common experiences and history based on identity.”
- Taquiena Boston; adapted from framing for 2015 General Assembly

Guiding thoughts:

- The aim is to ground people of color groups in celebration of people of color’s identities and the positive gifts of family, ancestry, ethnicity, legacy, and history.
- The aim is to ground white people’s groups in accepting their own whiteness without shame or defensiveness, with curiosity around how whiteness has played out in their family and history and to build healthy, anti-racist identities.

Spiritual Preparation for Facilitators

“The intent of forming race-based affinity groups is to deepen and broaden the perspectives of participants to produce new ways of thinking, because creating a different type of group can create a different kind of conversational outcome. In addition, [to creating space for identity exploration and fortification,] the purpose of racial identity groups is to support multicultural community by helping groups to engage in what Eric Law describes as ‘doing homework together’ before encountering other cultural communities. This exercise is intended to further encourage the development of spiritual practices that support the doing of anti-racist/multicultural work.”

- From “[Building the World We Dream About: For Young Adults](#)”, Leader Resource about race-based reflection groups

For White Facilitators

Before you facilitate a white identity group, find about 20 minutes to center yourself and think or write on some or all of the following questions.

Reflection Questions:

- “What is whiteness?” What are your chosen identities and what are your assigned identities?
- Whiteness is a construct. How can we talk about our whiteness without getting “hooked” by the idea that being white is your “fault?”
- How does white supremacy malnourish our capacity for resilience, consciousness and courage?
- What is life-giving and affirming for you about dismantling white supremacy?

For People of Color (POC) Facilitators

Before you facilitate a POC identity group, find about 20 minutes to center yourself and think or write on some or all of the following questions.

Reflection Questions:

- What is “race”? What are your chosen identities, and what are your assigned identities?
- What does it mean to practice a theology of gratitude for your skin color, hair, ancestry, heritage? What does that look like to you?
- What is life giving and affirming for you about being with other People of Color?
- As POC caucus spaces are often multiracial spaces, what listening/sharing will support your spiritual growth?



Race Based Affinity Groups

Spiritual Preparation for All Participants

Reflection prompt:

Invite participants to share with the cohort their responses to the following questions: Do you know the story of one of your ancestors? Or a partial story? What lesson does that story hold for you in your life today?

Movement Prayer:

Leader speaks the words and leads the movements:

First, we bow to honor the Spirit of Life (all bow) We lift our arms and embrace the gifts of Spirit (raise arms skyward) We bring those gifts unto ourselves with gratitude, and breathe, and smile (bring your arms inward until you are hugging yourself, then smile, and breath all together, deeply)

We share the gifts of Spirit with the world. (bring arms outward, reaching out horizontally, palms open)

We remember to be present (close hands in prayer position with very soft clap of meditative awakensness)

Honor (all bow)

Embrace (raise arms outward and skyward)

With Gratitude (hug yourself, smile, breathe together)

Share (bring arms outward, reaching out to the right and left)

Be Present (bring hands together in soft clap and prayer pose)

The next time we do the prayer, it is silent:

(bow deeply)

(raise arms skyward)

(hug yourself, smile, breathe deeply together)

(bring arms out, palms open reaching outward)

(soft clap, hands in prayer position)

Blessed Be

- Rev. Sarah York, Taryn Strauss

Before the Introduction Activities

If possible, do a go-around the night before (or week or month if you're in a youth group or other ongoing context) and ask folks to share their name, pronouns if they wish, race and ethnicity and some other fun thing. Gently follow up as facilitators with folks who are unsure how they identify, so that participants can be best prepared for affinity based space. For example, white Hispanics/Latinx, biracial people, culturally Jewish people or others may need some conversation and guidance to find which group to attend. The most common group delineations are: White, People of Color, and multiracial (if your cohort is large enough to have both a POC and multiracial group). Other possible groups, depending on size: People of African Descent, Caribbean, Native/American Indian, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latina/o/x and Hispanic and Middle Eastern/Arab.



Race Based Affinity Groups

Introduction Activities

For POC participants and white participants

Name, pronouns if you wish, race and ethnicity (there are no wrong answers and “I’m not sure” or “I don’t know what word to use” are okay!) and...

- One way that my racial/ethnic identity impacts my spiritual life.
- Something I love about my race/ethnicity is ___ and something that is hard about

my race/ethnicity is ___.

- One way that I express my racial or ethnic identity is _____.
- One person of color whose leadership I admire and why.

For People of Color Cohort

Opening Quote:

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”

- W. E. B. Du Bois

Name, pronouns if you wish, race and ethnicity (there are no wrong answers and “I’m not sure” “or I don’t know what word to use” are okay!) and...

- What lessons/messages did you receive about your race as a child? What do you wish you had been taught when you were a child?
- One person of color whose leadership I admire and why.

For White Cohort

“We must be courageous for racial justice, not shameful about racism.”

- Chris Crass

Name, pronouns if you wish, race and ethnicity (there are no wrong answers and “I’m not sure” or “I don’t know what word to use” are okay!) and...

- Describe one of the first times you realized you were white.
- One white person whose anti-racist leadership I admire and why.



Race Based Affinity Groups

Rituals

Calling on Ancestors (POC cohort)

Share a relevant reading or a song. Ask folks to share names of ancestors that they want to bring into the room. People who they are thinking of, family members (chosen or of origin), who have supported them, Unitarians of color, Universalists of color, UUs of color, justice makers of color. You can share in a simple go round, popcorn style, have folks say a name and then have the whole group say it back, have folks say a name and group respond “Presente,” or have folks put stones in water, light candles, as each name is said.

Building an Ancestor Altar (both cohorts)

Ask participants to bring an object that represents their ethnic/racial/spiritual ancestry. After a reading or a song (a good option is <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/it-time-and-place>). Have folks share about their object. You may also want to focus the sharing and ask folks to share about something from an ancestor they want to honor or transform. White folks often find it meaningful to talk about things they inherit that they want to transform.

Making Bracelets (for white cohort)

Distribute large-ish beads and have participants reflect on a time they felt stuck in white discomfort (shame, defensiveness, paralysis). Then have folks share their moment they want to let go of as they put the bead onto a circle of string, and tie loosely as a bracelet. String the bracelets on to one string together so it hangs low. Acknowledge that it does not help us or further collective liberation to hold onto to those moments. While we don’t need to stay in individual discomfort, we need to take collective responsibility for the weight of white supremacy. Each person then takes back a bracelet, not the one they made, to accept the responsibility of working to dismantle white supremacy, saying, “White supremacy is not my personal fault, but it is our collective responsibility.” (Full litany available by Rev. Ashley Horan.)



Race Based Affinity Groups

Conversations

What's in the Box? (POC cohort)

Place a large piece of easel/flip-chart paper in the center of the group. Draw a box. Distribute markers. Ask each participant to write and/or draw in the box what they are allowed to be and do as a person of color (or whatever identity the affinity group is for – ex: for a black person or Latinx person; or as a woman of color) and draw and/or write outside the box what they are not allowed to be or do. Let folks write for about 5 minutes, then ask folks to share what stands out to them, patterns, anything they wrote that they want to share more about. Make sure to note that how oppression works is that we are set up to not win (ex: as women of color we're told to be sexy but not slutty, smart but not too opinionated). The takeaway of this activity is usually around the fact that we get to resist the boxes society puts us in.

Tell the story (both cohorts)

Tell a story, or as much as you know, of your family's/ancestors relationship to the U.S. If you are Native American/Indian or Chicano/a that might be the story of "the border crossing you." Others are encouraged to tell the story of your family's/ancestors journey to the U.S. How do you think your family/ancestors have been impacted by white supremacy? Participants may reflect on access to education, segregated schooling, access to affordable housing, immigration policies, voting rights and more. This can be made into an interactive activity by putting a large map on the wall and/or a timeline and giving folks some sort of sticker and asking them to put stickers on the map to represent generally or specifically where their ancestors are from and on the timeline to represent generally or specifically when their ancestors came to the US. Acknowledge the pain of not knowing where genetic ancestors came from because of enslavement, adoption, forced migration, disconnection between generations. Connect this pain to the outcomes of systems of oppression.

Internalized oppression (for people of color):

Explain internalized racism with a story from your real life. Then, invite participants to draw a square on a piece of paper. In the square write or draw things that they have internalized about themselves as a person of color or as a person of their racial/ethnic background. Outside the square, write or draw things that they have internalized about people of other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Share out in pairs and then as a full group. Repeat the activity but instead of listing ideas that people have internalized, list ways to get free from those ideas. Share out in pairs and then as a full group. Take notes as people list ways to get free.

Internalized supremacy (for white people):

Explain internalized white supremacy with a story from your real life. Then, invite participants to draw a square on a piece of paper. In the square write or draw the ways our culture normalizes whiteness, prefers white/European standards (for example: blond is beautiful). Outside the square, write or draw things that they have internalized about people of other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Share out in pairs and then as a full group. Repeat the activity but, instead of listing ideas that people have internalized, list ways to get free from those ideas. Share out in pairs and then as a full group. Take notes as people list ways to get free. This activity could be run for white folks with a frame of internalized superiority and how to get free.



Race Based Affinity Groups

Resilience/Bonding

White Cohort

Go around and answer the question, “what messages did you receive about your race from your parents? From your school? From your religious leaders? From your community?”

What do you wish your parents/teachers/mentors had told you?

For Cohort of Color

What songs, artists, help you remember what tools you have to deal with experiences when you are profiled or experiencing racism? Invite someone to begin a list on an easel/flip-chart, gathering everyone’s responses and sharing them as resources to help us through.

Re-engagement Activity, for each cohort:

We do work in race-based affinity groups so we can do better work, more authentically and with greater integrity, when we come back together.

Checkout: Name someone else in the group who taught you something during our time together, and share what you learned from him/her/them.

Ask everyone to stand or sit in a circle when everyone comes back together. Read this quote from bell hooks:

“The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others.”

- bell hooks

Invite folks to meditate or reflect on their responses to the following questions as they look around the room: When is it easy to choose love? When is it hard to choose love? Then invite people who want to, to share a phrase, popcorn style, about how they will choose love to move towards freedom. Encourage white people to think about how love can help them continue to develop their anti-racist identity, encourage POC to think about how love can help them continue to develop resilience and fortify their identity.