



UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALIST  
ASSOCIATION

DISCUSSION GUIDE | 2016-2017

# UUA Common Read: *The Third Reconstruction*

by The Reverend Dr. William J. Barber  
with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove

Discussion Guide by Gail Forsyth-Vail

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Single-Session Version</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Three-Session Version</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Session 1: Moral Dissent</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Session 2: Leadership</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Session 3: Building Coalitions for the Third Reconstruction</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Leader Resource: First, Second, and Third Reconstructions – Key Points</b> .....	<b>26</b>

**Cover photo:** Rev. Dr. William Barber gathers with co-presenters at a Moral Political Organizing Leadership (MPOLIS) training hosted by the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry (UUUM) at First Parish Roxbury in Boston, MA, July 21, 2016. Photo by T. Resnikoff.

# Introduction

*The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement*, by the Reverend Dr. William J. Barber with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove (Beacon Press, 2016), has been selected as the 2016-17 Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Common Read. Unitarian Universalists were electrified at General Assembly 2016 by Rev. Barber's call to build and sustain a movement for justice for all people; now is a moment for Unitarian Universalists to answer that call. *The Third Reconstruction* offers helpful, practical guidance to engage with movements that arise in response to local experiences of injustice. Drawing on the prophetic traditions of Jewish and Christian scripture, while making room for other sources of truth, the book challenges us to ground our justice work in moral dissent, even when there is no reasonable expectation of political success, and to do the hard work of coalition-building in a society that is fractured and polarized.

This discussion guide invites participants to explore and examine three important themes in the book: moral dissent, leadership, and building fusion coalitions. It explores William Barber's framing of the history of fusion movements in the United States and the centrality of race in those movements. It lifts up some of the words written in the Afterword by Barber's co-author, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a white evangelical Christian who challenges predominantly white churches on the issues of racism and white privilege. This guide includes the option to use video clips from Rev. Barber's address to the 2016 UUA General Assembly. Also provided are links to supplementary materials and specific guidance for how to take action.

## Using this Guide

The discussion guide is flexible. Adapt it to congregational, cluster, or district programming for adults of all ages and life stages, for campus groups or young adult groups, for youth groups, or for cross-generational groups of adults and youth. Two formats are offered:

- A single, 90-minute session
  - Can be expanded for a two-hour session
  - Can be offered in two parts to accommodate a 45-minute Sunday forum format
- Three 90-minute sessions
  - Can each be extended to a two-hour session by lengthening the amount of time for conversation, discussion, and sharing

The guide asks facilitators to write questions on newsprint. We also provide slides to use instead if you have access to a computer and projector.

# Single-Session Version

## Goals

- Provide a framework for responding to *The Third Reconstruction*
- Invite readers to share their reactions and reflections in a safe and trusting community
- Invite participants to act from their Unitarian Universalist values in response to what they learn from the book and to put into practice “Fourteen Steps: Forward Together.”

## Materials

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Leader Resource, First, Second, and Third Reconstructions: Key Points
- Optional: Video clips from Rev. Barber’s address at the 2016 UUA General Assembly:
  - [First Reconstruction](#) (05:10)
  - [Second Reconstruction](#) (04:59)
  - [Third Reconstruction](#) (03:12)
- Optional: Computer with Internet access

## Preparation

- Set out the chalice.
- Write these covenant points on newsprint, but do not post:
  - We promise to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
  - We promise to listen respectfully to the experiences and perspectives of other people.
  - We promise to pay attention to the group process, making sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and to listen.
  - We promise to use this time as an opportunity for ethical, religious, and spiritual discernment.
  - We promise to listen to one another for understanding rather than to debate, even when the conversation touches on politics or public policy.
- Write on newsprint, and post:
  - What stays with you after reading the book, *The Third Reconstruction*?
- Write this second set of prompts on newsprint, but do not post:
  - Speak about a time when you witnessed or experienced the microphone being handed to poor or marginalized people that they might tell their own stories.

- Have you ever been in the position to share your story publicly as one directly affected by oppression or injustice?
- Optional: Plan to watch [Rev. Barber's address](#) at the 2016 UUA General Assembly in its entirety (01:09:30).
- Optional: Download videos. Queue videos and test equipment.

## Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading/Introductions (5 min)

Welcome participants. Light the chalice and share the words from p. 3 of the book:

*When we were growing up, Grandmamma and her nieces always cooked for the whole family.... When I was at her house, I often sat with them in the kitchen. They would hum songs from church as she rolled out biscuits and stirred pots on her old gas stove. They also had a ritual whenever the food was done. Grandmamma would take a bottle of the anointing oil that she rubbed on people's heads when she prayed for them and slip it in the front of her apron. She and the other ladies would take some money, a rag, and some of the food they'd cooked and they would say, "We'll be back shortly. We've got to go and hope somebody."*

Invite each person to introduce themselves and to share what brought them into the room for this discussion. Point out "Fourteen Steps Forward Together," the Appendix for Organizers beginning on p. 127 of the book. Tell participants that after a conversation about their immediate responses to the book, you will focus on three of the fourteen points, then turn to possible actions to follow up the discussion.

## Creating a Covenant (5 minutes)

Post the covenant points you have written 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.

## First Impressions (10 minutes)

Invite participants to share an initial response to the book. Call attention to the question you have posted and allow silence for two or three minutes for people to find their words. Then, ask them to share, one at a time, without interruption.

## Sharing and Discussion: Empower Local People (10 minutes)

Say, “The first step of the fourteen in the appendix calls for empowering local people.” Read aloud this quote from p. 114 of the book:

*People would say, “We want to have a Moral Monday here. Will you come and be our speaker?” The first thing we had to make clear was that fusion organizing always takes the long view. There is no such thing as a Moral Monday. What’s more, a state-based, state-government-focused fusion coalition needs indigenous leadership. I could lead in North Carolina because I was raised in North Carolina, went to school in North Carolina, pastored and organized my whole life in North Carolina, lived and breathed North Carolina. We’d spent years helping our own people realize that we couldn’t wait for leadership from somewhere else to come and save us; we were the ones we had been waiting for. It was our time now.*

Lead a discussion using these questions:

- How does the idea that effective justice organizing must arise from local concerns connect with your own experiences? Have you ever been part of a local organization trying to make your community or state a better place for all?
- What are the advantages—both tactical and spiritual—of “going back home” in our justice-making efforts?

## Sharing: Lifting Up Voices of those Directly Affected (15 minutes)

Say, “The fourth step of the fourteen in the appendix calls for lifting up the voices of those most directly affected by oppression and immoral policies.” Share these two quotes from the book:

*We do not speak for those who can speak for themselves. We do not create a platform for politicians to speak for those who can speak for themselves. Directly affected people are the best moral witnesses. Our movement exists to let those voices be heard. p.128*

*Ours is a movement raising up leaders, not an organization recruiting followers. p.122*

Post the second set of questions and read them aloud. Invite people to share direct personal experiences rather than commenting based on print or visual media: Allow a minute or two of silence for people to find their words. Then, invite each person to share briefly, uninterrupted. Mention that for this conversation and any others, each person reserves the right to pass. As time allows, invite participants to respond to what others have shared.

(Optional: If offering this discussion in two 45-minute sessions, provide a break now. When the group re-gathers, summarize the discussion from the first part before beginning the second.)

## Video and Discussion: The Centrality of Race (25 minutes)

Say, “The fifth step of the fourteen in the appendix calls for recognition of the centrality of race in moral dissent and a commitment to the long-term work of racial equity.” If possible, share the three videos, telling participants that Barber reiterated and expanded upon some of the points in his book when he addressed the 2016 UUA General Assembly. If it is not possible for you to share the videos, share key points about the First, Second, and Third Reconstructions using the Leader Resource as a guide. Whether using the videos or the leader resource, invite participants to recall some of the forces that ended the First and Second Reconstructions. Write responses on newsprint. Allow 15 minutes for this portion of the activity.

Then, lead a discussion using these questions to guide you:

- What did you learn in school or from your own study about post–Civil War reconstruction? About the Civil Rights movement? What surprised, unsettled, or uplifted you in Barber’s framing those two movements as the First Reconstruction and the Second Reconstruction?
- What do the lessons of history tell you about the strong push back in the public square that we see today?

## Reflecting and Acting: The Stirring of the Spirit (15 minutes)

Share this quote from p. 38 of the book:

*Holistic community development, rooted in the power of the Spirit, depended on its own kind of fusion coalition. Yes, we needed dedicated church folk with faith that not only motivated them but also gave them a distinct, prophetic vision for their work in the community. But we also needed community partners. We needed to come together with banks and businesspeople, with other people of faith and people of no particular faith. When we went to share with others the vision we’d received from the Spirit, we found that the Spirit was already moving them. The church didn’t have a monopoly on God’s dream. No, the Spirit was stirring all over the community.*

Lead a discussion about what actions you and your congregation or organization might take to take part in the nascent Third Reconstruction.

Here are some possible actions:

- Read and share “Fourteen Steps Forward Together,” from the book’s Appendix (p. 127). Gather an ongoing group to explore how to apply those steps to your congregation’s justice work.
- Get to know local organizations led by people directly affected by injustice. Explore their websites or written information and attend public actions or events they sponsor. Find out how your congregation or group can be helpful and what resources the organizations offer so you can learn more. Can your congregation offer meeting space for interfaith groups or secular organizations working on justice issues using a moral argument?
- Learn about legislative initiatives that call for a moral stance. Check with your state’s [Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network](#), if there is one, to find out about their efforts. Help organize support for initiatives in line with Unitarian Universalist values.
- Learn more about [Repairers of the Breach](#), an organization that “works to reconnect our shared faith traditions with public policies rooted in the moral values of justice, fairness, and the general welfare, which are embedded in the federal and state Constitutions; and train clergy and lay moral leaders and advocates to become fusion-movement leaders and to freshen the great wellsprings of our democracy based on past moral movements that have made possible the great progressive victories in our history.” Watch and share [videos and resources](#) from the website. Find out if a [moral revival](#) event is coming to a city near you, and if so, make plans to attend.
- Explore the website of [Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism](#) (BLUU). Learn more about the #ReviveLove Tour focused on movement fortification and healing, and co-sponsored by [Standing on the Side of Love](#) and [Rev. Sekou and the Holy Ghost](#).
- Connect with the local chapter of [Showing Up for Racial Justice \(SURJ\)](#). SURJ is a national network of groups and individuals organizing White people to act as part of a multi-racial majority for racial justice while supporting and collaborating with local and national racial justice organizing efforts.
- Get involved with the work of [Standing on the Side of Love](#) (SSL). Read “[Facing the Dragon](#),” a March 16, 2016, letter by Caitlin Breedlove, SSL campaign director, about the role Unitarian Universalists can play in today’s movement for social justice.
- Organize small groups in your congregation to more deeply explore personal journeys through the lens of race. Connect with or visit the website of [DRUUMM](#), a UU People of Color organization, or visit the website of [Unitarian Universalist Allies for Racial Equity](#) (ARE) for resources, suggestions, and connections.

- Gather to read or reread some past Common Reads which may be helpful in your work. The UUA's discussion guides for each include links to supplementary resources and suggestions for action.
  - [\*Just Mercy\*](#) by Bryan Stevenson (death penalty abolition; prison and criminal justice system reform)
  - [\*Reclaiming Prophetic Witness\*](#) by Paul Rasor (UU moral values in public issues)
  - [\*Behind the Kitchen Door\*](#) by Saru Jayaraman (food workers' rights)
  - [\*The New Jim Crow\*](#) by Michelle Alexander (opposition to mass incarceration/racism in US criminal justice system)
  - [\*Acts of Faith\*](#) by Eboo Patel (interfaith justice-making work)
  - [\*The Death of Josseline\*](#) by Margaret Regan (immigration)

Collect email addresses so you can share possible actions. Ask individual participants to commit to specific actions and timelines for further discussion about your group's actions.

## Closing (5 minutes)

Share this reading from p. 122 of the book:

*If we refuse to be divided by fear and continue pushing forward together, I have no doubt that these nascent movements will swell into a Third Reconstruction to push America toward our truest hope of a "more perfect union" where peace is established through justice, not fear. This is no blind faith. We have seen it in North Carolina. We have seen it throughout America's history. And we are witnessing it now in state-based, state government-focused moral fusion coalitions that are gathering to stand against immoral deconstruction. Ours is the living hope of America's black-led freedom struggle, summed up so well in Langston Hughes's memorable claim that although America has never been America to him, even still he could swear, "American will be!"*

Thank participants and urge them to go forth and act to support and build movements for justice in our time.

# Three-Session Version

## Goals

- Provide a framework for responding to *The Third Reconstruction*
- Invite readers to share their reactions and reflections in a safe and trusting community
- Invite participants to learn about the meaning and practice of moral resistance
- Lift up the importance of making space for the leadership and the stories of those most directly affected by oppression
- Explore the historical context for the current movements for justice for those on the margins
- Invite participants to act from their Unitarian Universalist values in response to what they learn from the book and to put into practice “Fourteen Steps: Forward Together.”

# Session 1: Moral Dissent

## Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Optional: Computer with Internet connection and digital projector/speakers
- Optional: Video clip, [“Resist the One Moment Mentality,”](#) from Rev. Barber addressing attendees at the 2016 UUA General Assembly (01:12)

## Preparation

- Set out the chalice.
- Write these covenant points on newsprint, but do not post:
  - We promise to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
  - We promise to listen respectfully to the experiences and perspectives of other people.
  - We promise to pay attention to the group process, making sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and to listen.
  - We promise to use this time as an opportunity for ethical, religious, and spiritual discernment.
  - We promise to listen to one another for understanding rather than to debate, even when the conversation touches on politics or public policy.
- Write on newsprint, and post:
  - What stays with you after reading the book, *The Third Reconstruction*?
  - What surprised, troubled, or challenged you, or made you think?
  - What inspired you from the book?
- Write this second set of questions on newsprint, but do not post:
  - What in your story/experience can you offer as testimony to the power of moral resistance?
  - What stories can you tell of times when you acted on the belief that your own well-being is connected to the well-being of those who suffer?
  - Was your moral dissent rooted in your Unitarian Universalist faith? If so, how?

## Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading/Introductions (5 minutes)

Welcome participants. Light the chalice and share the words these words of Rev. Barber, speaking at the 2016 UUA General Assembly:

*We must tell America if you think we are just going have one march, or one campaign, you must be out of your mind, because we are going to resist the one moment mentality. We are building a movement, we are building a movement of moral dissent, and we win either way. We win if we win everything we're fighting for, and we also win if we don't win it but we sow the seeds for victory in the days to come. But whatever it takes, we're going to walk together children and we're not going to get weary because it's time for a Third Reconstruction. It's time for a Third Renewal. It's time for a revival of love and hope and truth and justice all over this country.*

If you prefer, show the [video clip](#) of Barber saying these words. Then, invite each person to introduce themselves and to share what brought them to this discussion.

## Creating a Covenant (5 minutes)

Post the covenant points you have written 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.

## First Impressions (20 minutes)

Invite participants to share an initial response to the book. Call attention to the questions you have posted and allow silence for a minute or two for people to find their words. Then, ask them to share, one at a time, without interruption.

After the sharing, briefly ask participants to identify common themes in their initial responses.

## Sharing: Stories of Moral Resistance and Dissent (25 minutes)

Say:

Barber calls us to base our resistance to poverty, racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and other forms of inequality on what is morally right, not on what is politically possible. He speaks of “saving the soul of America” and notes that each person’s well-being is connected to the well-being of those who suffer (p. 46).

Share this quote from p. 24 of the book:

*In a movement based upon moral dissent, defeat does not cause us to doubt our purpose or question the ends toward which we strive. We do not belong to those who shrink back, for we know the tragic truth of history. When oppressed people shrink back, they will always be forgotten and destroyed. Faith-rooted moral dissent requires that we always look forward toward the vision of what we know we were made to be. But defeat can and must invite us to question our means. While realism cannot determine the goals of our faith, it must shape our strategy in movements of moral dissent.*

Post the second set of questions and read them aloud. Invite participants to consider their own stories of moral resistance and to share them with one another. If your group has five or fewer people, ask each person to share in turn without interruption. If your group has six or more people, divide into groups of three or four and invite people to share with one another. Ask each person to limit their story to four minutes, telling the group when it is time to move to the next speaker.

## **Conversation: Sowing Seeds in Defeat (25 minutes)**

Remind participant of the story of Justice John Marshall Harlan of Kentucky, who wrote the only dissenting opinion in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, which declared in 1896 that “separate but equal,” and therefore Jim Crow, was constitutional. The book points out that his dissenting words and reasoning, although on the losing side in 1896, formed the basis of the *Brown v. Board of Education* opinion 58 years later reversing the separate-but-equal decision. In his moral dissent, Justice Harlan sowed the seeds of eventual victory, even though he did not live to witness it.

Lead a conversation, asking:

- When have you been part of a justice effort or event that was unsuccessful or that ended in defeat? What lessons did you take from that defeat? Do Barber’s insights change your understanding in any way? Reflect on the positives in the seeming negative.
- How does one balance what is politically attainable at a particular moment with what is morally right? Has Barber’s call for taking the long view, no matter what, changed your thinking about that balance?

## **Closing (5 minutes)**

Extinguish the chalice and share these words from p. 3 of the book:

*When we were growing up, Grandmamma and her nieces always cooked for the whole family.... When I was at her house, I often sat with them in the kitchen. They would hum songs from church as she rolled out biscuits and stirred pots on her old gas stove. They also had a ritual whenever the food was done. Grandmamma would take a bottle of the anointing oil that she rubbed on people’s heads when she prayed for them and slip it in the front of her apron. She and the other ladies would take some money, a rag, and some*

*of the food they'd cooked and they would say, "We'll be back shortly. We've got to go and hope somebody."*

Invite participants to reflect on this question for the next session: What does hope look like for you? What stories of hope do you hold in your heart to sustain you in acting for justice?

# Session 2: Leadership

## Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Covenant from Session 1
- Optional: Video of Sweet Honey in the Rock performing "[We Are the Ones](#)"

## Preparation

- Post the covenant from Session 1.
- Set out the chalice.
- Write on newsprint, and post:
  - Speak about a time when you witnessed or experienced the microphone being handed to poor or marginalized people that they might tell their own stories.
  - Have you ever been in the position to share your story publicly as one directly affected by oppression or injustice?
- Write this second set of prompts on newsprint, but do not post:
  - Have you heard or been part of conversations where people express frustration over their inability to point to a national leader for the movement for racial justice?
  - Share your experience of a time when you have heard or been part of conversations where people not directly affected have made judgements regarding the tactics or strategy of locally organized movements for justice, or even tried to lead those movements.
  - Why is it that well-meaning people often try to speak for marginalized people in the public square?
  - What would change in the justice work of your congregation, group, or organization if a priority was placed on creating space for marginalized people to tell their own stories in the halls of power and in the public square?
  - What role can people with privilege and power play in ensuring that marginalized people have the opportunity to do this?
  - What commitments will you make to help your congregation or organization prioritize the voices and leadership of those most directly affected by oppression? How will your commitments require you to shift your own behavior? If you are among those directly affected by injustice, what commitments will you make to lift up your voice and experience? If you come from a place of privilege, how will you prioritize the voices of those most directly affected?

## Opening Reading/Chalice Lighting (10 minutes)

If you wish, play just the audio from the “We Are the Ones” video as people enter the room. Then, light the chalice and share these words from civil rights leader and organizer Ella Baker. Ella Baker was an advisor for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960s and a tireless advocate for youth:

*Oppressed people, whatever their level of formal education, have the ability to understand and interpret the world around them, to see the world for what it is, and move to transform it.*

Review the covenant from Session 1. Invite participants to respond to the closing questions from Session 1, as they are moved to do so:

- What does hope look like for you?
- What stories of hope do you hold in your heart to sustain you in acting for justice?

## Discussion (20 minutes)

Read this quote from p. 114 of the book:

*People would say, “We want to have a Moral Monday here. Will you come and be our speaker?” The first thing we had to make clear was that fusion organizing always takes the long view. There is no such thing as a Moral Monday. What’s more, a state-based, state-government-focused fusion coalition needs indigenous leadership. I could lead in North Carolina because I was raised in North Carolina, went to school in North Carolina, pastored and organized my whole life in North Carolina, lived and breathed North Carolina. We’d spent years helping our own people realize that we couldn’t wait for leadership from somewhere else to come and save us; we were the ones we had been waiting for. It was our time now.*

Lead a discussion using these questions:

- How does the idea that effective justice organizing must arise from local concerns connect with your own experiences? Have you ever been part of a local organization trying to make your community or state a better place for all?
- What are the advantages—both tactical and spiritual—of “going back home” in our justice-making efforts?

## Sharing: Lifting up Voices of Those Directly Affected (15 minutes)

Say, “There is a tendency of national media to want to name and lift up a single leader to speak for a movement. Rev. Barber rejects the role of single leader and remains committed to lifting up the voices of everyday people.” Share these two quotes from the book:

*We do not speak for those who can speak for themselves. We do not create a platform for politicians to speak for those who can speak for themselves. Directly affected people are the best moral witnesses. Our movement exists to let those voices be heard. p. 128*

*Ours is a movement raising up leaders, not an organization recruiting followers. p. 122.*

Call attention to the posted reflection prompts. Invite people to share direct personal experiences rather than commenting based on print or visual media: Allow a minute or two of silence for people to find their words. Then, invite each person to share briefly, uninterrupted. Mention that for this conversation and any others, each person reserves the right to pass. Invite participants who choose to pass to offer a response after others have spoken. As time allows, invite participants to respond to what others have shared.

## Conversation: Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (15 minutes)

Say:

In his address to the 2016 UUA General Assembly, Rev. Barber spoke of the Black Lives Matter movement as one of the important signs that we are at the time of a Third Reconstruction. Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU) was very present at the same General Assembly. The BLUU organizing collection had several months earlier offered the [seven principles of Black Lives](#).

Read a part of the statement:

*Principle #5: Most directly affected people are experts at their own lives.*

*Those most directly affected by racial injustice & oppression should be in leadership, at the center of our movement, and telling their stories directly.*

*We stand in the Movement for Black Lives at a time in which voting rights are being threatened at every turn. Black people are being denied the most basic of rights—the right to vote and have adequate representation in our country. We work towards a society in which Black life is valued, in which Black life is not discarded, in which Black Lives Matters, and in*

*which the work of Black people is seen as equal to their white counterparts. Black voices in our congregations, in our faith, and in the world must be valued.*

Lead a conversation, asking:

- Why is it so important both to Rev. Barber's coalition and to BLUU that those most directly affected be the ones to speak and to lead?
- Why does such a principle need to be so clearly stated?

## **Discussion and Commitment: Pledging Allegiance to the Other America (25 minutes)**

Say: "In his afterward, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove explains something of how he came to work with Rev. Barber on the book, *The Third Reconstruction*. Wilson-Hartgrove is a white Christian pastor. He speaks of his role in the movement and the role of others not directly impacted by racism and poverty." Share his words from p. 135:

*Our job is not to take the lead, but to pledge our allegiance to the other America- the country that has not yet been but one day shall be.*

Post the second set of questions and read them aloud. Allow a moment or two of silence for participants to gather their thoughts and then lead a discussion using the questions to guide you.

## **Closing (5 minutes)**

Close with this quote from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," written April 16, 1963:

*Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Perhaps I must turn my faith to the inner spiritual church, the church within the church, as the true ... hope of the world. But again I am thankful to God that some noble souls from the ranks of organized religion have broken loose from the paralyzing chains of conformity and joined us as active partners in the struggle for freedom. They have left their secure congregations and walked the streets of Albany, Georgia, with us. They have gone down the highways of the South on tortuous rides for freedom. Yes, they have gone to jail with us. Some have been dismissed from their churches, have lost the support of their bishops and fellow ministers. But they have acted in the faith that right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. Their witness has been the spiritual salt that has preserved the true meaning of the gospel in these troubled times. They have carved a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment. I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid*

*of justice, I have no despair about the future. I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are at present misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with America's destiny.*

Extinguish the chalice.

# Session 3: Building Coalitions for the Third Reconstruction

## Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Covenant from Session 1
- Leader Resource, First, Second, and Third Reconstructions: Key Points
- Optional: Video clips from Rev. Barber's address to the 2016 UUA General Assembly:
  - [First Reconstruction](#) (05:10)
  - [Second Reconstruction](#) (04:59)
  - [Third Reconstruction](#) (03:12)
- Optional: Computer with Internet access

## Preparation

- Post covenant from Session 1.
- Set out the chalice.
- Write on newsprint, but do not post:
  - Where is the Spirit stirring in your community or state? Have you personally felt a longing for justice that has moved you to action?
  - Barber calls for a fusion coalition that includes groups and organizations who may seem to be unlikely partners. Has your congregation ever formed a coalition with an unlikely partner? Have you personally? What was that like? What did you learn from that experience?
  - What hesitations do you have about working with people who may not agree with you on every point? How did Barber work through his own hesitations?
  - With whom does your congregation or group partner? How might you expand to include others you with whom have not previously worked?
- Optional: Watch [Rev. Barber's address](#) at the 2016 UUA General Assembly in its entirety (01:09:30).
- Optional: Download videos. Queue videos and test equipment.

## Opening Reading/Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Share this reading from p. 122 of the book:

*If we refuse to be divided by fear and continue pushing forward together, I have no doubt that these nascent movements will swell into a Third Reconstruction to push America*

*toward our truest hope of a “more perfect union” where peace is established through justice, not fear. This is no blind faith. We have seen it in North Carolina. We have seen it throughout America’s history. And we are witnessing it now in state-based, state government-focused moral fusion coalitions that are gathering to stand against immoral deconstruction. Ours is the living hope of America’s black-led freedom struggle, summed up so well in Langston Hughes’s memorable claim that although America has never been America to him, even still he could swear, “American will be!”*

Light the chalice and review the covenant from Session 1.

## **Videos and Discussion: Framing History (40 minutes)**

If possible, share the three video clips, telling participants that Barber reiterated and expanded on some of the points in his book when he spoke at the 2016 UUA General Assembly. If it is not possible to share the videos, share key points about the First, Second, and Third Reconstructions using the leader resource as a guide. Whether using the videos or the leader resource, invite participants to recall some of the forces that ended the First and Second Reconstructions. Write responses on newsprint. Allow 15-20 minutes for this portion of the activity.

Then, lead a discussion using these questions to guide you:

- What did you learn in school or from your own study about the post-Civil War Reconstruction? About the Civil Rights movement? What surprised, unsettled, or uplifted you in Barber’s framing of those two movements as the First Reconstruction and the Second Reconstruction?
- Today’s movements for justice and equality include Black Lives Matter, transgender rights, and economic justice. How does framing those movements as part of a nascent Third Reconstruction unify them and help their members work together?
- What do the lessons of history tell you about the strong pushback in the public square that we see today?

## **Sharing: Carrying the History Inside of Me (15 minutes)**

Read aloud this passage from the Afterward written by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, from p. 135 of the book:

*The process of telling this story has taught me something about fusion politics that may help other readers understand where they fit in in America’s Third Reconstruction. We can neither hear nor tell stories without asking ourselves along the way where we find ourselves in this story. As I’ve reflected on American history since the First Reconstruction, I’ve had to confess that I know the fear which has created a backlash*

*against a black-led freedom movement time and again. It was suggested in a thousand conversations I overheard growing up—and clearly stated in more than one. I cannot pretend that the resistance to what I've written here is somewhere else. I carry it within me.*

Note that these words were written by a white man about his experience. Invite participants to reflect on his words and on the ways in which they might carry either stories of freedom movements or of resistance to those movements inside their own personal and family history. Then, ask them to share, one at a time without interruption, any parts of their personal reflections that they would like to share with one another. Urge them to explore their personal histories further, and to make time to share their reflections and explorations with trusted family members and friends going forward.

## **Reflecting and Acting: The Stirring of the Spirit (25 minutes)**

Share this quote from p. 38 of the book:

*Holistic community development, rooted in the power of the Spirit, depended on its own kind of fusion coalition. Yes, we needed dedicated church folk with faith that not only motivated them but also gave them a distinct, prophetic vision for their work in the community. But we also needed community partners. We needed to come together with banks and businesspeople, with other people of faith and people of no particular faith. When we went to share with others the vision we'd received from the Spirit, we found that the Spirit was already moving them. The church didn't have a monopoly on God's dream. No, the Spirit was stirring all over the community.*

Post the questions you have written on newsprint. Lead a discussion about what actions you and your congregation or organization might take to respond to respond to the nascent Third Reconstruction, helping to give it legs.

Here are some possible actions:

- Read and share “Fourteen Steps Forward Together,” from the book’s Appendix (p. 127). Gather an ongoing group to explore how to apply those steps to your congregation’s justice work.
- Get to know local organizations led by people directly affected by injustice. Explore their websites or written information and attend public actions or events they sponsor. Find out how your congregation or group can be helpful and what resources the organizations

offer so you can learn more. Can your congregation offer meeting space for interfaith groups or secular organizations working on justice issues using a moral argument?

- Learn about legislative initiatives that call for a moral stance. Check with your state's [Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network](#), if there is one, to find out about their efforts. Help organize support for initiatives in line with Unitarian Universalist values.
- Learn more about [Repairers of the Breach](#), an organization that “works to reconnect our shared faith traditions with public policies rooted in the moral values of justice, fairness, and the general welfare, which are embedded in the federal and state Constitutions; and train clergy and lay moral leaders and advocates to become fusion-movement leaders and to freshen the great wellsprings of our democracy based on past moral movements that have made possible the great progressive victories in our history.” Watch and share [videos and resources](#) from the website. Find out whether a [moral revival](#) event is coming to a city near you and, if one is, make plans to attend.
- Explore the website of [Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism](#) (BLUU). Learn more about the #ReviveLove Tour focused on movement fortification and healing, and co-sponsored by [Standing on the Side of Love](#) and [Rev. Sekou and the Holy Ghost](#).
- Connect with the local chapter of [Showing Up for Racial Justice \(SURJ\)](#). SURJ is a national network of groups and individuals organizing White people to act as part of a multi-racial majority for racial justice while supporting and collaborating with local and national racial justice organizing efforts.
- Get involved with the work of [Standing on the Side of Love](#) (SSL). Read “[Facing the Dragon](#),” a March 16, 2016, letter by Caitlin Breedlove, SSL campaign director, about the role Unitarian Universalists can play in today’s movement for social justice.
- Organize small groups in your congregation to more deeply explore personal journeys through the lens of race. Connect with or visit the website of [DRUUMM](#), a UU People of Color organization, or visit the website of [Unitarian Universalist Allies for Racial Equity](#) (ARE) for resources, suggestions, and connections.
- Gather to read or reread some past Common Reads which may be helpful in your work. The UUA’s discussion guides for each include links to supplementary resources and suggestions for action.
  - [Just Mercy](#) by Bryan Stevenson (death penalty abolition; prison and criminal justice system reform)
  - [Reclaiming Prophetic Witness](#) by Paul Rasor (UU moral values in public issues)
  - [Behind the Kitchen Door](#) by Saru Jayaraman (food workers’ rights)

- [The New Jim Crow](#) by Michelle Alexander (opposition to mass incarceration/racism in US criminal justice system)
- [Acts of Faith](#) by Eboo Patel (interfaith justice-making work)
- [The Death of Josseline](#) by Margaret Regan (immigration)

Collect email addresses so you can share possible actions. Ask individual participants to commit to specific actions and timelines for further discussion about your group's actions.

## Closing (5 minutes)

Share “Your Life Matters,” by Kenny Wiley, a *UU World* senior editor and director of faith formation at Prairie Unitarian Universalist Church in Parker, Colorado. He is also a leader in Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism and in the Movement for Black Lives in the Denver area.

*Most of us Unitarian Universalists are here because we felt welcome here—at last. Some of us were too agnostic somewhere else. Some of us weren't vindictive enough somewhere else. We were too working-class somewhere else. We were too lesbian somewhere else. We were too nerdy somewhere else, too introverted somewhere else, too gay-married somewhere else.*

*Many of us are here because this faith and the people in it affirmed: you may not be perfect, but your life matters just the same.*

*That's what's on the line now. Through racism and posthumous victim-blaming, through silence and bullets and indifference and vilification, black people are being told that our lives do not matter—or that they matter only conditionally. Black lives matter if: If we are educated. If we are respectful. If.*

*And sometimes, not even then do our lives matter.*

*Right now we as Unitarian Universalists are being called to act. We are being called by our ancestors—those who demanded that we help end slavery, that we fight for suffrage, that we join the struggle to end Jim Crow, that we listen to and honor Black Power.*

*Lydia Maria Child and Theodore Parker are calling us.*

*Lucy Stone is calling us.*

*Fannie B. Williams and Frances Ellen Harper are calling us.*

*James Reeb is calling us.*

*Viola Liuzzo is calling us.*

*Guided by that enduring, unfulfilled promise of the belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, ours is a faith that has said, or worked to say to those who have been marginalized:*

*You are a woman, and your life matters.*

*You are gay or lesbian, and your life matters.  
You are transgender, and your life matters.  
You are bisexual, and your life matters.  
You have a disability, and your life matters.  
You were not loved as a child, and your life matters.  
You struggle with depression, and your life matters.*

*Right now we are being called—  
by our ancestors, by our principles, by young black activists across the country—  
to promote and affirm:*

*You are young and black, and your life matters.  
You stole something, and your life matters.  
I have been taught to fear you, and your life matters.  
The police are releasing your criminal record, and your life matters.  
They are calling you a thug, and your life matters.*

*Our ancestors, principles, and fellow humans are calling on us to promote affirm, with deeds  
and words: Black lives matter.*

Tell participants that the reading can be found on the UUA Worship Web. Extinguish the chalice and thank participants, urging them to go forward and act to support and build movements for justice in our time.

# Leader Resource: First, Second, and Third Reconstructions – Key Points

## First Reconstruction

- The movement began in the shadow of slavery, amid the wreckage of the Civil War.
- Abolitionists had challenged America with America's own words in its Constitution and in the Bible and made a moral critique of slavery.
- Right after slavery, black and white people in the South saw themselves as allies. Poor white farmers and newly freed Black people formed a fusion coalition.
- By 1868-1870 every statehouse in the South was controlled by a progressive black/white fusion coalition (often majority black).
- Coalitions used a moral framework to rewrite constitutions all over the South, guaranteeing national citizenship, equal protection under the law, the right to vote, the right to education, the right to sit in the jury box, and other rights.
- The new North Carolina constitution included rights of all persons to life, liberty, the fruit of one's own labor, and the pursuit of happiness.

## Second Reconstruction

- Blacks, whites, Latinx, young people, Jews, Catholics, Protestant Christians, and some Muslims come together to build a fusion movement. Leaders such as Dr. King talked about the moral necessity of now.
- In the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, nine white justices, one a former member of the KKK, were pushed by Thurgood Marshall's team of Jewish, black, and white lawyers on moral grounds and they overturned separate but equal. Marshall's argument used a deep moral framework to challenge segregation, saying that it was not within the moral framework of our constitution. It had taken 58 years to do it.
- The Civil Rights movement began in 1954. Emmett Till was murdered the next year, and his mother let the nation view her son's broken body.
- Rosa Parks was a leading figure in the Civil Rights movement, organizing long before the Montgomery bus boycott.
- Bayard Rustin, a black, gay leader in the Civil Rights movement said, "We've got to do some jazz – bring the Gospel, a little Gandhi, the social Gospel movement, and the radical churches that fought against slavery. Bring it all together." A fusion coalition was formed.

- During this period, social security was expanded to include those who hold occupations traditionally held by people of color and poor people. Medicare was also part of the Second Reconstruction.

### **Third Reconstruction**

- The electorate that elected president Obama was a sign of the Third Reconstruction. It was a fusion coalition: black, brown, gay, straight, young, old, Republican, Democrat, and independent.
- The movement began to build a moral framework that showed people how their commonality in pain also represents the possibility of their power if they hook together.
- That electorate scared the extremists. Significant pushback has happened, with the goal of not allowing the Third Reconstruction to get any legs under it.