

***White Supremacy Teach-In 2***  
**Reverend Cyndi Simpson**  
**A Teach-In Given at the Second Unitarian Church of Omaha, October 22, 2017**

***White Supremacy Teach-In***

So, how did we get here, to having a White Supremacy Teach-In for this Sunday morning's worship?

Since last spring, as many of you know, there has been some positive turbulence in our Unitarian Universalist faith nationwide around racism in our faith. It seemed to begin with a concern about hiring at the national level of our Unitarian Universalist Association.

But it was much more about an ongoing refusal, by Unitarian Universalists of color. Laypeople, ministers and other religious professionals. A refusal to continue to accept the white supremacy of our Unitarian Universalist faith. The way it is lived in our institutions, the way we worship, the way we make decisions and yes, the way we hire.

A group that formed two years ago – Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism, known as BLUU – asked congregations to hold a White Supremacy Teach-In this last spring, which I did here on May 28<sup>th</sup>.

The purposes of BLUU are to fight structural racism in our UU faith, to support black UUs and to expand the role and visibility of black UUs within the faith. BLUU is working in solidarity with other groups in the UUA representing LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, indigenous people and people who identify as Latinx and Asian-American. BLUU was also formed to participate in national movements in support of black lives and racial justice in our country.

Lots has happened since then!

This summer, we elected a new President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Reverend Susan Frederick-Grey. The first woman President of our faith. Long overdue!

Our UUA Board of Trustees promised to fundraise \$5.3 million to support the work of Black Lives of UU.

We are overhauling our hiring processes and as a faith, looking at many of the ways we operate as a white supremacy culture.

As you may NOT know, although our faith is associated with positive actions towards racial justice. Our support of anti-slavery movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Our participation in the Civil Rights movement of the early 60s. And we love to tell those stories, as we should.

Our history, including our more recent history, is marred by dreadful behaviors around race at the institutional as well as the individual level. That is history we all need to know. And I intend to teach it!

So there is much, as a mostly-white religious faith, for which we white UUs have to atone and which we have to repair and which we must change when it comes to race.

And, several months ago, BLUU asked congregations again to participate in a second White Supremacy Teach-In. Many members of BLUU, including Kenny Wiley, Aisha Hauser and Christina Rivera, labored for hours and days and weeks to provide us with excellent worship resources for both Teach-Ins.

So, I come to you again for this Teach-In. I come to you with humility. I have not learned all there is to know about anti-racism and racial justice. I will not pretend that my behaviors as a white person are free of racism and of white supremacy. To claim that would be a lie.

What I hope I am is a white person who listens to what people of color have to say and who believes their lived experiences of racism. And doesn't deny it or make excuses for it. And I hope I am a white person who acts positively and supportively based on that. Because I believe this nation must change.

Our racism, past and present, is an open wound, an unhealed wound, that is destroying our country. It is destroying us. White people as individuals must change. This congregation and the wider UUA must change. Because all of us who are white benefit from and participate in structures of white supremacy. Every single white one of us.

And as a religious tradition, we have SO MUCH to learn about our Unitarian Universalism and its promise and its purpose from the people of color and indigenous people who have chosen, against many odds, to become Unitarian Universalists.

I am here to do my best this morning with a subject that is too large for any single Sunday or a whole bunch of Sundays.

In your Developmental Ministry application that brought me here, you said that you dream of a congregation that welcomes and embodies diversity of all kinds. Embracing the work of racial justice is necessary for that diversity to exist. And it is necessary for this congregation to exist and for our UU faith to exist. If we don't get this right, we will cease to exist as a faith.

I have made racial justice and anti-racism a priority for my ministry this year. I hope to bring a group of people together to address this within and beyond our congregation in a way that truly will bring change. So – look out for that!

Each of us needs to bring some important stuff to this work. Not sure what all of that might be. But know that one thing we must bring is our LOVE. Our love for our faith, for one another, for justice, for all humans and other beings.

This past week I started a session of Anti-Racism coaching for UU ministers. Our coach is Julica Hermann de la Fuente, who is a candidate for the UU ministry. She has been a life coach for years and also a lay community minister for social justice in our faith.

She wanted to create for us a space of freedom and safety for us as we engage with anti-racism. No shaming and no blaming. This does not mean we will be comfortable or unchallenged. What Julica said to us and what I share with you is her stance on beginning to work with us or with anyone regarding social justice. I urge you to keep it in mind as we engage in all that we do here, especially racial justice work.

**“I already always love you.”**

Let's say that together to one another: "I already always love you."

So what are we going to do today? Cannot do it all!

Overall, I want to bring you a worship experience that is emotional and visceral as well as educational. I want you to hear the voices of people of color and UUs of color. I want you to hear about our own faith and the broader concerns of racism in America. I want you to be challenged to do better. I want you to have some more tools and concepts and practices to do that.

Above all, I want you to commit – personally – to RACIAL JUSTICE.

So first, let us revisit what White Supremacy is. I realize that is not a term most of you will associate with yourselves or this congregation or the UUA. But when you understand what it really is. Not only white robes and overt racist behaviors. I hope you will understand why the term does apply to all of us who are white, to this congregation and to the UUA.

Let's read together:

***"White supremacy is a system or social order that keeps power and resources consolidated among white elites, using an ideology (or way of understanding the world) that upholds whiteness — including white people, white cultural values, and white institutions — as being best or most 'normal.'***

***It's not active hatred of people who are not white or an active belief that white people should rule over everyone else. It's not limited to the most overtly racist fringe elements of society. It's not a slur or an insult. It's not an historical artifact. Rather, it's the water most white people swim through without realizing they are wet. It's a basic fact of U.S. culture and everyday life and a foundational truth of this country."***

Let's have a musical meditation. The song "CHAINS" is from rappers Usher and Nas, supported by Bibi Bourelly. There are curse words and other hard words to hear in this song. It is about the larger concerns of racism and bias towards black people in this country. Especially the killing of unarmed black people by police. I urge you to read the full lyrics online.

The video begins with voices and words that say:

*While racial injustice keeps killing  
Society keeps looking away.*

At the end of the song, there is the chorus of:

*We still in chains.  
You put the shame on us.*

Followed by the words:

*Facing the facts is the first step towards change.*

Yes, as long as we white people deny and deflect and ignore racism and white supremacy, no change will come.

It is not going to be easy, but we must.

Let us now turn our attention to hearing from a Unitarian Universalist, a leader of Black Lives of UU. Dr Takiyah Nur Amin.

*As a black woman who claims Unitarian Universalism as my faith identity, I have felt compelled to clarify and yield to what's truly most important to me in the last few months. The election and subsequent outrage, the confusion, vitriol, and violence that has shown up in its wake have encouraged me to reaffirm my commitments to working for justice, as well as to recommit to protecting those who are most vulnerable, shaping my life in such a manner that it responds to and reflects what my values are as a black woman of faith in this tradition.*

*One reason I am a Unitarian Universalist is because it is a faith where I can bring all of the best of what I was taught growing up in my multifaith family and **because, as a religion grounded in principle and reflection, justice-making and righteous action are essential to our faith, not something ancillary.***

*This resonates deeply for me, and connects to my grandparents' social justice efforts as members of Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal Zion congregations and to my parents' legacy as socially conscious, progressive Muslims. My deep sadness as a Unitarian Universalist is that while this faith community has always been a space that welcomed my varied religious heritage, my blackness hasn't always felt at home here.*

*That is to say, I have never been able to take for granted that I would be welcome in UU spaces as a black woman. No matter how long I've been a member, what committees I've served on, or the number of times I've been a GA delegate, I've never been able to take for granted the sense of home and welcome and connection that I see my white UU siblings proudly proclaim.*

*Still, there are resonances that keep me going. I am motivated as deeply by the seven principles of Kwanzaa as I am by the Seven Principles upheld by our association and member congregations; these are all touchstones of my personal theology. The Seven Principles of Black Lives, created in 2015 by the Black Lives of UU Organizing Collective, act as another bridge for me, connecting me ever more deeply to this faith and to the work of the Movement for Black Lives.*

Hear her voice as she speaks of her experiences in our faith.

Please repeat after me: "I hear [pause] and I believe [pause] Takiyah Nur Amin."

Want to share and reflect to some of your comments in response to the last White Supremacy Teach-In in May.

I asked you to put your answers to two questions on index cards. My hope was to get a sense of what is happening here at Second Unitarian with white supremacy. And some ideas about what would be helpful to you in addressing this issue.

The questions were:

- 1. What are your concerns/feeling/thoughts on hearing about the white supremacy culture in the UUA and our congregations?**
- 2. What would be helpful for you regarding efforts to make 2U a multicultural and anti-racist organization?**

Regarding the first question, some of the words and thoughts you shared were:

Angry	Not Surprised
Concerned	Sad
Disappointed	Distressing
Alarmed	Shocked
Important	Disturbed
Grateful	Fear
Ashamed	Excited
Worried	Pain
Positive	Anticipation

These feelings and thoughts seemed really appropriate to me. There were some deflections, denials and folks who did not seem to want to accept the White Supremacy label. These responses are normal. Very helpful as they say where folks are at. I appreciated your openness and honesty. You went deep!

One concern that I do want to clear up is that someone said that what happens at the UUA doesn't really warrant much of a response because it was more about me, as the minister.

I need to be clear that the UUA is not the staff people in Boston and around the country. We are an ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS. Yes, there are people and volunteers who work for our central office as STAFF to the UUA. But the UUA, by definition, is ALL of us. Everyone in every congregation. So when I talk about the UUA being a White Supremacy organization, I'm talking about us, right here. This congregation. Not just UUA staff.

Regarding the second question, here are some of your thoughts:

Education	Talk about it in worship every week
Talk consistently	More social justice work <u>outside</u> our congregation
Presentations from people of color	I don't know – how DO we do this?
More conversation/awareness about my role in White Supremacy	
Skills on overcoming our White Supremacy	

Review. Importance of not knowing.

Education – yes. Many different kinds. Very impressive that you want this.

One thing – many people mentioned wanting to see and hear directly from people of color. That's tricky. White supremacy is a white people problem. We cannot ask for the emotional labor of people of color to set us right. Rather, we white people need to educate ourselves and one another, because we are where the problem lies. It's OUR behavior as white people that needs to change. In accountability to people of color.

I am so impressed with your insights and your willingness and even "excitement" and "anticipation" about engaging with this. I found reading these cards to be very heartening and informative.

One of the questions folks asked is "what do we do?"  
Want to share some skill building via a video.

Michael Eric Dyson, Professor of Sociology, Georgetown U

Video link: “Why white Americans Don’t See Themselves When They Hear the Word ‘Race’”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9zD6gOeDYQ&t=23s>

What is Professor Dyson’s challenge?

For those of us who are white – to talk to our white families, friends, co-workers and challenge their and our own White Supremacist assumptions. And there is much more than we can and will do together.

I close with these words of the Reverend Doctor Qiyamah Rahman:

*Now is the time.... to hold to the steadfast hands and hearts and prayers of the ancestors that have brought us this far. Time to make them proud and show them, and ourselves, what we are made of.*