



Vol. 6 Number 2 – June 2024

MAC **A r r o w**

**Unitarian Universalist
Multiracial Unity Action Council
(UUMUAC)**

**“For the Unity of the
light and dark skinned
people of the world.”**

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The Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Unitarian Universalist Multiracial Unity Action Caucus to carry out and foster anti-racist and multiracial unity activities both within and outside the Unitarian Universalist Association through education, bearing witness and other actions, and expansion of our membership both within and outside the walls of our congregations.

We also seek to defend our UU Principles against those who seek to undermine them.

The Vision Statement

We envision our congregations, denomination, and society as not being color blind but color appreciative; as judging and treating members of the world’s rank and file by the content of their character, not the color of their skin or their cultural heritage; and as treasuring diversity in the context of the “Beloved Community.” We call this vision Multiracial Unitarian Universalism.

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An Open Letter to the UUA Board

by Dick Burkhart

This is a response to the Coleman Hughes book “The End of Race Politics”. Why not make this book a common read? It explains clearly why identity politics has become so damaging (see my review at the bottom), and I consider the UUA to be a prime example. In fact Hughes’ elucidation of *neoracism* explains a lot about the ARAOMC program of the UUA. We are in desperate need of an open and honest dialogue about issues of race to replace today’s cancel culture.

My conclusion is that it is way past time for the UUA to shut down its support for the kind of identity politics that gets into political and ideological partisanship. DRUUMM is the prime example, as it has continued the anti-white ideology of the black power movement of the 1960s, in direct opposition to both our 7 principles and to the “black and white together” principles of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We saw the damage done by members of DRUUMM in the 2017 “hiring controversy”, with blatantly false accusations of “racism”, soon followed by equally defamatory “white supremacy” workshops. When the UUA Board caved in to this slander, Rev. Peter Morales and others took the only honorable way out and resigned. Following neoracist doctrine, the accusers showed no interest in evidence, reason, or dialogue – they wanted blood in the form of confession (their euphemism is “engagement”), a well-known totalitarian tactic from 20th century Stalinism and Maoism.

In 2019 the neoracist takeover really went off the guardrails when Rev. Dr. Todd Eklof published his book, “The Gadfly Papers”, calling for open and honest dialogue instead of all the censorship and nastiness. What followed was some of the worst slander in the entire history of Unitarianism and Universalism. After all, it was a book and evidence for the accusations (promoted by DRUUMM) should have been obvious, but neither I nor many others who looked hard could find any.

I concluded that it was all in the minds of the accusers, which was soon verified by the infamous “ministers’ letter”: a real witch hunt, in the flesh and blood, just like out of the Salem witch trials. And Todd decided to refuse the process that followed as an act of nonviolent resistance when he realized that it would be a kangaroo court, not a dialogue.

Here I would like to note another key feature of neoracism, a feature that explains this highly unethical behavior by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee: Its rejection of the most basic standards of fairness and justice, such as the principles of legal due process. We need an entirely new membership for the MFC – legal experts dedicated to due process to counteract the current ideology of double standards and bias.

But it is clear that we’re not dealing with just a few rogue or mentally disturbed characters. We’ve had a spectacular failure of leadership, with a total failure to hold

miscreants accountable, or to lead a truth and reconciliation process. In fact, the authoritarian attitudes and practices have gotten so bad that many of us no longer regard the UUA as representing a liberal religion.

Instead what I see is a leadership in a state of moral collapse, unable to tell right from wrong, hostage to unscrupulous identity activists, a kind of mirror image of what we see in Trump-land, what some call Woke-land, as it applies in different degrees to the full range of identity politics, not just race.

Here I use the word “woke” as it has evolved in general discourse, not the original meaning of “alertness to injustice” – my forte’ through decades of activism. Now it is associated with unsavory words and actions, such as cancel culture – justice gone off the rails into injustice when people abandon Gandhian principles, when the ends justify the means.

This “woke identity politics” has strong roots: on the religious side, in orthodox, dogmatic, and cultish religious styles, and on the political side in authoritarian, totalitarian, and fascist regimes. The damage includes many congregations with major losses of membership (up to ½), or breakups, over woke ideology. An example would be a minister offending congregants by attempting to impose the blame and shame “whiteness studies” of Robin DiAngelo, often with the backing of UUA staff. Another example would be censorship of those who dare question woke doctrine or practices in the spirit of our 4th principle. Both examples come from congregations near me.

Here is a brief overview of neoracism in the UUA.

The Crossroads anti-racism trainings, described by Rev. Thandeka in 1999 (“Why Anti-Racism Will Fail”, 1999) and later by David Reich (“The Anti-racism Trainings”, 2010), were indoctrination into a new theology that sprouted in the mid 1990s.. The following trinity of doctrines proclaimed by the Lutheran minister Joseph Barndt mimics Christian theology:

- (1) *All whites are racist.* => “condemned by original sin”
- (2) *No blacks are racist.* => “the righteous or anointed”
- (3) *Whites must confess their racism.* => “everyone must confess their sins to be saved”

In racial terminology these doctrines constitute prejudice, noting that a strong majority of whites are not racist in any demonstrable way according to recent surveys. Since the common meaning of racism is *prejudice or discrimination based on race*, we conclude that these Crossroads workshops were themselves racist. Analysts such as Coleman Hughes and Finley Campbell call this neoracism, with anti-white doctrine being its most prominent feature.

20 years later the UUA was once again promoting neoracism in the form of Robin DiAngelo’s “White Fragility”. DiAngelo uses more academic language to target an audience susceptible to white guilt but her extreme accusations violate every canon of good scholarship and ethics: *White identity is inherently racist. White people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy.* (p 148).

In fact I would describe DiAngelo's 2018 book as the most notorious racist tract of the early 21st century, on par with Madison Grant's "The Passing of the Great Race" in 1916, just for a different racial hierarchy. Many black authors, such as McWhorter and Hughes, regard DiAngelo's over-the-top racism as anti-black as well as anti-white because of the way it belittles black people. Also, the strong aura of know-it-all superiority she projects is eerily suggestive of the "white supremacy" that she decries. Her racism is so extreme that at times it has fascist overtones, recalling Hitler's blaming and shaming demonization of the Jews.

I see the profits that Beacon Press has made off DiAngelo as blood money. It's way past time for the UUA to pull its support from neoracism masking itself as anti-racism. Again, let's have a denominational wide, uncensored discussion on identity politics.

The most recent manifestation of neoracism in the UUA is its obsession with a mythical "white supremacy culture". After all, did the COIC report find any evidence of actual white supremacy (*attitudes and practices of white racial superiority*)? No, it didn't even try. Instead it just made accusations without evidence.

I soon realized that the UUA was attempting to distort the phrase "white supremacy" to have another meaning - a vague and contested concept only tangentially related to the customary meaning. I regard this kind of manipulation of language as highly unethical - Orwellian in fact. It is sometimes referred to as "weaponizing". In this case it is used to justify wielding "white supremacy" as a weapon against ordinary people or practices or institutions that have nothing to do with actual white supremacy, a fringe movement which is justly reviled.

In the end the ambiguous COIC concept reduces to simply blaming a racial category for anything that seems to go wrong, instead of trying to understand and fix the complex systems that are involved. This is similar to Kendi blaming all racial disparities on racism, a ludicrous notion that Hughes easily demolishes. The result is just another manifestation of neoracism.

The COIC report has no valid statistics on racism or white supremacy and the recommendations are not based on well-studied best practices. It is essentially propaganda, so it needs to be thrown out, not used to justify new authoritarian intrusions such as the Accountability Team, which is not in the UUA Bylaws, let alone itself accountable by any democratic process.

Moreover, since the COIC report was able to document only a small number of racial incidents, mostly of the microaggression kind, the entire project seems way off base in a world facing an escalating number of calamities due to ecological overshoot and limits-to-growth.

The evidence I've seen is that most people of color do not go along with the neoracism promoted by the UUA, so even ethnic-type diversity in the UUA may be suffering. In a world threatened by authoritarian responses to limits-to-growth, a UUA reinvigorated by a serious commitment to our 7 principles could make a real difference. We could promote dialogue based on evidence and reason to find common ground rather than throwing gasoline on the fires of polarization.

QUEEN SOFIA IS A UNIVERSALIST?!

Richard Trudeau

The unelected UUA President, Sofia Betancourt, claims to be a Universalist. I find this puzzling.

First, she is authoritarian. But Universalists had more "trouble with authority" than even modern UUs claim to have. Universalists were organized by state, and never allowed their national organization to have real authority. Their chief national official, whose title was "General Superintendent," had much less authority than the corresponding Unitarian official, the AUA President. Famously, in 1792 Universalists in Newport, RI, were reluctant to even meet for worship, for fear of the ecclesiastical structure they felt would inevitably follow!

Second, she supports fully the UUA's labeling of itself in political terms—e.g., as "anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multi-cultural" (ARAOMC). This goes against the grain of Universalist sensibility, which tended to keep religious issues and political issues separate. Many early Universalists had been Baptists, and brought into Universalism the Baptist commitment to maintain strict separation of church and state. The great Universalist leader, Hosea Ballou, was involved *as a private citizen* in major social-justice campaigns of his day—notably, against slavery and capital punishment—but *not* in his role as a Universalist pastor. In 1816, Universalists in Stoughton, MA fired their minister for "preaching politics from the pulpit"; they'd have fired Sofia, too.

Third, she speaks of "Universalist love" as something that, ideally, people feel for one another. But the "love" which Universalists stressed was *God's love for humans*, not the disinterested human-to-human love (*agape*) preached by Judaism and Christianity, which of course Universalists also preached.

Fourth, she is openly scornful of the First UU Principle ("the inherent worth and dignity of every person"), which is identical in meaning to the Universalist principle, "the supreme worth of every human personality," contained in Universalism's culminating declaration of faith (General Assemblies of 1935 and 1953).

I could go on

Unitarian Universalist Theology of Sin

by James Anderson



UU leadership is in the process of making an appalling about-face in the most fundamental aspects of their theology. This reversal is rejecting a proud tradition that maintained just the opposite of what the leadership now promotes. It employs through-the-looking-glass upside down sophistry that has turned a post-modernist rejection of Enlightenment values into a weird adoption of traditional dogmatic theological mandates; turning post-modern skepticism about meta-narratives into its own dogmatic meta-narrative that contradicts its own foundational premise. Freedom, reason and tolerance are no longer acceptable in this upside down world that imagines itself boldly striding into a new liberatory renaissance. Nothing could be further from the truth; instead of ushering in a new promised land of revolutionary activism,

it has staggered back into a Neo-Calvinist fundamentalism, dogmatically segregating the “saved” from the “damned.”

Traditional religions cater to a powerful hard-wired impulse to belong to a “righteous” tribe. Coupling this with turning on cathartic attractions to self-flagellation in many believers, traditional Christianity created a powerful theology of sin, confession of sin, repentance of sin and forgiveness of sin. Only after this deep shame based process, could one be welcomed into the righteous tribe. But, even after gaining entrance to the True Faith, the redeemed sinners were kept on track by constant reminders of the shame and depravity of their fallen condition which had resulted in the torture and death of the sinless Son of God who had died to redeem them. His agonized suffering on the cross towered over their sanctuaries.

Unitarianism and Universalism have proud historical roots in centuries of heretics and dissidents who opposed this theological control drama, often at the cost of their lives. It was an act of great courage to oppose orthodox Christian theology of sin and salvation; of the division between the “saved” and the “damned.” But, to be true to themselves, they felt it necessary to proclaim that a loving Creator would not create something like Hell in which to torture his beloved Creation for eternity. It is this irrefutable and essential logic that lies behind the First Principle: “We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person.”

It is, therefore, a tragic shattering irony that, in blatant contradiction of the convictions of those UU forebears, the theologians presently occupying the highest levels of the organization are in the process of instituting a “new” theology that is very little different from the oppressive tradition of sin, confession of sin, repentance of sin and forgiveness of sin. Here is how Rev. Thandeka [phrased it in 1997](#)

The theological principle behind all this is expressed in Joseph Barndt's book, Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America... Barndt's belief that all whites are racists is based explicitly on the Christian doctrine of original sin, which claims that through Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden human nature was corrupted — a doctrine linked to the Trinitarian claim that only through the death of Jesus and with the assistance of the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit can human nature be saved. In every age, Christian theologians have found new language to explain this doctrine. The anti-racist doctrine is just such a recent example... Barndt insists that whites will always remain sinners because their nature is corrupted. They are thus slaves to what Barndt calls — and again to use his language — the original sin of racism

UU's who participated in Barndt's Crossroads training in the 1990's as part of the "Journey Towards Wholeness Path to Anti-Racism" were surely aware of this atavistic theology. But, being UU, they may have felt they were immune to this doctrinaire Christianity because they believed UUism was above all that Christian foofaraw. They were well aware that Barndt was, indeed, a Christian and thus, as evolved and enlightened UU's, they could take his course and remain unaffected and only select for their re-education the enlightened anti-racist parts of it.

There is a common perception that UU's are "intellectually arrogant" and "snobbish," and that they believe that they are elevated above the common herd because they all tend to be highly educated professionals who practice a particularly evolved and enlightened religion. This is somewhat true; you can't shake a stick without hitting some kind of PhD in a UU congregation. (And, as every con artist knows, some of the best marks are those that have an elevated opinion of themselves.)

It is a dangerous course to set; to proclaim your sect is above the superstitions and prejudices of all other sects. It opens the door to the very human tendency in all of us to want to

the “One True Church.” Perhaps a denomination that rose above the dogmatic superstitions of traditional Christianity, and which attracted many Humanists and atheists to its ranks, was primed to be taken over by more basic sentimental theological self-righteousness. Rev. Kate Braestrup addressed this in her essay [“Snob Faith”](#)

When you can access formerly boutique beliefs at the religious equivalent of Wal-Mart, the bar for luxury religion is raised and, given the unprecedented speed at which ideas travel these days, it will be raised and raised again. And so the UU brand has to be continually updated so as to remain obviously special and expensive.

And, now the bar has been raised so high that UU theology has circled around and begun devouring itself in a purity spiral that is unsustainable. This is the idea of the “Horseshoe Theory” where extremes of belief on either “side” bend back towards each other and become more similar. This seems applicable to the trend towards authoritarianism and the emphasis upon “covenant” and “accountability” that the new UU theologians are writing into the basic tenets of UUism.

This may also be a process influenced by a changing cultural milieu that Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianovitch call a [“culture of victimhood”](#)

...in the 18th and 19th centuries most Western societies moved away from cultures of honor ... to cultures of dignity in which people are assumed to have dignity and don't need to earn it... this culture of dignity is now giving way to a new culture of victimhood which... gives rise to intense efforts to identify oneself as a fragile and aggrieved victim...it creates a society of constant and intense moral conflict as people compete for status as victims or as defenders of victims.

So UU's in their desire for being seen as dwelling upon the peak of the highest moral high ground have invited in a dynamic where the "saved" and the "damned" have been replaced by "victims" and "oppressors." And these have become linked to essential identities, not character. We are either born into the Original Sin of whiteness or born without sin, like Jesus was considered to be, if we were not white at birth.

Original Sin and salvation have been introduced into the UU mainstream in the primary UU organ of communication — the "UU World." Here is a selection from Rev. Bill Sinkford's article, ["The Dream of White Innocence"](#)

There is a reason that our nation hastened to embrace that warm and fuzzy dream of an American welcome table, where exceptional individuals can transcend their circumstances. That dream allowed us all, but especially white Americans, to maintain a belief in their own innocence... This American Dream, this new white identity, requires a "vivid performance of innocence," as Teju Cole describes it, despite the truth that there is no actual innocence and never was.

And then here is a clear elucidation of the new UU theology: "Sin is Personal, Not Just Systemic: [Does the sin of white supremacy live in us or in the systems beyond us?"](#)

The collective sin of white supremacy is a material and particular sin, and we cannot redeem it at a distance or in the abstract. If we are to get free of white supremacy together, we must move into relationships of solidarity and particularity, in which our lives matter, materially, to one another.

Without getting into the deplorable details of the deeply dishonest 2017 “Hiring Controversy” that led to the “Commission On Institutional Change” and their profoundly biased report on white supremacy in UUism, it is worthwhile to look at their “theological mandate” to understand how the move from UUism as a dissident faith into a traditional faith of sin and salvation was justified theologically. A few citations from the [“Theology”](#) section of that terrible piece of theological propaganda can give a taste of how that move was propagated, beginning with this language from Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt:

We are on a journey toward redemption. We have lived a year filled with lamentation... with the strength of generations, the failures of the everyday, and the deep-down gritty messiness that is the promise of our salvation.

And then from Mary Byron

As a white person, I have needed to do a lot of deep spiritual work on myself. Unlearning the ideas of supremacy that I have absorbed from our culture is so much harder than learning about injustice, yet I know we won't move away from our comfort in white supremacy until we unlearn and dismantle it in our lives... When I moved past claiming my innocence in building these systems and denying their racist intent to see them, really see how they operate, I couldn't unsee their injustice.

And then from Dr. Elias Ortega:

If we believe in collective salvation, we must also believe in collective sacrifice. It is powerful that our faith community is working to reclaim this sacred practice

And then from the section, “Recommendation: Reinterpretation of Our Theological Legacies”

Sharon Welch notes that from an ethical perspective, we are called to liberate ourselves from bias, stating that a theology of liberation frees us from not seeing bias or privileged systems and allows us to see the threats of white violence.

This is not a “reinterpretation” this is a fundamental theological overhaul, a dramatic about-face from a religion of freedom, reason and tolerance to one of sin, salvation and redemption. The new proposed revision of the basic tenets of the faith and elimination of the 7 Principles and Purposes is a major step in that theological vandalism. This is to be voted on in the upcoming UU General Assembly — a True Believers jamboree that gives UU leadership the ability to make tremendously false claims about “democracy.”

George Orwell did not know anything about Unitarian Universalism but he did have an incisive understanding of how the human animal behaves in social groups. Even though he didn’t know about UUism he did have a fine description of the UU GA in his book Animal Farm. As he well knew, power corrupts, even when packaged in the most noble sounding ideology:

..out from the door of the farmhouse came a long file of pigs, all walking on their hind legs ... out came Napoleon himself, majestically upright, casting haughty glances from side to side, and with his dogs gambolling round him. He carried a whip in his trotter. There was a deadly silence. Amazed, terrified, huddling together, the animals watched the long line of pigs march slowly round the yard. It was as though the world had turned upside-down. Then there came a moment when the first shock had worn off and when, in spite of everything-in spite of their terror of the dogs, and of the habit, developed through long years, of never complaining, never criticising, no matter what happened-they might have uttered some word of protest. But just at that moment, as though at a signal, all the sheep burst out into a tremendous

bleating of- "Four legs good, two legs better! Four legs good, two legs better! Four legs good, two legs better!" It went on for five minutes without stopping. And by the time the sheep had quieted down, the chance to utter any protest had passed, for the pigs had marched back into the farmhouse.

It is yet to be seen if the sheep will indeed drown out all other voices when the Article 2 revision comes up for a vote by "delegates." But this vote will not be democratic in any way shape or form. If it passes, as is most likely, the journey to Calvinist theology will be well on its way. Considering this, certain questions about sin and salvation for UU's are bound to arise.

Christian orthodoxy has struggled with whether redemption from sin is obtained through grace or through works. It is therefore only natural to inquire of this new UU theology: how does a white person gain salvation from the sin of whiteness? Is it through grace or works? Christians pretty much decided that it is grace, but there are a lot of problems with that. Does an evil person who has been evil all their life gain Paradise when they claim to accept Jesus as their savior on their deathbed?

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9.

But then James 2:24 says.

You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

Many Christian theologians like to emphasize works, because otherwise how would they get people to give them money and do the things they want them to do, if all the lazy slobs had to do was to pronounce fine sounding declarations of faith?

Likewise a UU white person seeking UU salvation from their sin of whiteness is facing some confusion. Is it devout confession of belief, like Rev. Don Southworth professed while daring to criticize the UU Board of Trustees decision to give \$5.3 million to BLUU (among other things)?

I identify as a white, cisgender male. I become more aware every day at how that identity clouds my decisions and actions, hopefully more and more unconsciously, despite the years of study, training and spiritual and personal development work I have done. According to our moderator Jim Key I am swimming in the water of white supremacy.

Can white UU's gain UU salvation by making similar declarations?

Not really.

UU Theologians seem to be coming down strongly on the side of [works](#):

I don't know that UUs on the whole are looking for more ways to do anything in particular. We are a verbose bunch, generally speaking — so I witness folks doing a lot of talking and thinking about this intersection, but not necessarily doing anything differently than they did the day before. This doesn't surprise me because the vast majority of UUs benefit from the oppressive systems they are being asked to dismantle and people don't want to sacrifice their ill-gotten gains. I also see many white UUs using their outrage and indignation as a stand-in for action, but your venting ultimately yields nothing because those of us who need access to resources can't do anything with your shock or frustration. — Dr. Takiya Nur Amin

Apparently UU confessional appeals to grace are woefully inadequate. The sinless are not going to accept pious repentant words any more. UU's are to be “accountable” to “covenants.”

As the UU President has said, (GA 2022 Session #409: Accountability, Justice, and Wholeness — UU Theologies of Liberation)

We have to be willing to say “no” in UU spaces. We talk about covenants as floors, not ceilings, yes, its aspirational. It should be something we lean into... you are so out of Covenant, you cannot be back in this community until you’re willing to do the work of repair. Covenant without consequences is not actually Covenant... So honestly, we have to learn how to say “no” — with love — ... with a loving reminder, we will be here when you are ready to do the work. You cannot break this community over and over again out of your, whatever it is, trauma, fear, anger, loss, despair. I mean, those are pastoral issues. You can always come home, but you got to come correct. That’s a covenant.

Since white UU sinners are all swimming in the sin of white supremacy culture they must “do the work” to “come correct” back into “covenant.” But who is it that is judging the “work” and who is it that will grant the salvation that will purportedly be obtained from doing that correct work? Traditional Christians looked to Jesus, who was born without sin as redeemer and savior.

Rev. Thandeka clearly revealed so many years ago who white UU sinners were to look to. Like Jesus, it was those who were born without the Original Sin of whiteness.

Lacking all agency, they thus can’t effect their own salvation. In short, they need a savior. And in the Barndt theology, this savior isn’t Jesus but, in a brash leap, “people of color.” Listen to what he says:

“Leadership and direction can only come from [people of color because they] understand racism far better than we do, and they know what needs to be done to eliminate it.

Thus, the first step toward breaking the chains of this prison [for white people] is to recognize that we cannot be in charge of the changing.”

So those who were born without the sin of whiteness look down on us with love, but also “saying ‘no’” until we “come correct.” And in their righteous, sinless state they await our entrance into the Beloved Community; await for us to go through the process of confessing the sin of whiteness, repenting the sin of whiteness and being forgiven for it by those born without sin. And then, in the spirit of “transforming the world through liberating love,” they may, perhaps, allow us to reside with them in the blessed Anti-Racist, Anti-Oppressive, Multi-Cultural Beloved Community.

Is “LOVE” the Central Theological Value of Unitarian Universalism?

By, Anne L. Schneider, PhD. - May, 31, 2024



The proposed revision of the Unitarian Universalist Association Article 2 not only reduces the 7 principles to a handful of clauses buried in other values and eliminates the freedom of belief commitment, but it also proposes a new set of values as the primary expression of Unitarian Universalism. This new set of values places “LOVE” at the center of UUism in a flower diagram surrounded by six other values: equity, interdependence, justice, generosity, pluralism, and transformation. What, we might ask, does “LOVE” mean and why is it centered?

Centering “LOVE” as a value may help align UUism with many other religions, especially Christianity, but what does LOVE actually mean in UUism? How has the Commission on the revision of Article 2 defined LOVE? Is this really the most central of all UU principles – the core of UU theology?

From a personal point of view, I have never thought to explain UUism to someone who asked about it, as a set of values with “love” as the center. I explain UUism as a religion that allows for freedom of belief, including agnostics and atheists as well as theists. I emphasize that one of our principles is a free and independent search for truth and meaning, as well as freedom of conscience and respect for the inherent worth and dignity of every person. I usually add, if they are still listening, that we believe in justice and compassion in human relations, world peace, the interdependent web of all existence and a serious commitment to freedom of belief. I explain UUism as centered in our 7 principles.

For me, the core of UUism is the free and independent search for truth and meaning. I am not sure about truth – that is, whether there really is any absolute truth – but meaningfulness means everything to me. And the life-long search to live a meaningful life

is my every-day obsession. Every day should be a special day even if that “specialness” is nothing more than hearing a mockingbird sing, jump in the air, flip twice, and land again. Saying good morning to my son who lives with me. Or having coffee with a friend and sharing something special just between us. Or taking a walk around the neighborhood or perhaps climbing just a bit into the Sonoran Desert’s South Mountain. Or seeing a coyote or javalina or a quail family with the chicks scurrying along between mom and dad. Even the sight of a rattlesnake or hawk can provide meaning and make my day a special one.

How are we to incorporate this new vision of UU values, with LOVE as its center, in our understanding of UUism? First, we need to find out what the Commission on Institutional Change (COIC) means by “love.”

Article 2 says we “draw on our heritages of freedom, reason, hope, and courage building on the foundation of love.” The core of UUism, I have always thought, is found in our freedom of belief, our tolerance for other beliefs, our capacity for reason, and our empathy which may be the most important of all human values. Yet, Article 2 says that “Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values.” I am jolted by section C-2.2 when it says “We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love.” The shared values are interdependence, equity, transformation, pluralism, generosity and justice. But what does “Love” mean? It still has no definition.

Digging deeper, I find that the charge to the committee says that Love is “love in action” and that “love in action,” is anti-racism, anti-oppression, multiculturalism. Now, this is not hyperbole on my part. That is actually what the charge to the group that rewrote Article 2 says:

The Board believes that one core theological value, shared widely among UUs, is love. ... Our commitment to personal, institutional and cultural change rooted in anti-oppression, anti-racism, and multiculturalism values and practices is love in action, and should be centered in any revision of Article II.

...

The new Principles and Purposes ... They should ask us to choose Love in Action as the path forward. Our commitment to anti-racism, anti-oppression, and multiculturalism is love in action, and should be centered in any revision of Article II.

That’s how the presumably “core” **theological** principle of Unitarian Universalism, Love, became a social justice project, not a theological principle at all. Love actually is not the love of Christianity or of other religions, or that idea of empathy or of agape, but is the social justice priority of the UUA: anti-racism, anti-oppression, multiculturalism.

And it now has become the core theological principle of UUism. Imagine, the conversation:

Friend: I know you go to a Unitarian-Universalist church. What is UUism all about?

UU: Well, it really is all about anti-racism, anti-oppression, and multiculturalism.

Friend: But, I mean, religiously. What are the core RELIGIOUS ideas?

UU: Our core value is Love.

Friend: Wonderful. But, what does “Love” mean?

UU: “Love” means “love in action” and that means anti racism, anti oppression, multiculturalism.

Friend: Oh. Are there some religious ideas in there somewhere?

Me: No. This “LOVE” is not the love found in so many religions that admonish us to be patient, kind, compassionate, humble and to love others and god. The “LOVE” centered in the proposed revision of Article 2 is a call to action – to political action. It is a worthy goal; a worthy part of a UU mission statement. But political action is not a religious value. This definition is a radical change and for me, is not a welcome direction for the future of Unitarian Universalism. UUism theology is the free and independent search for truth and meaning; it is the freedom of belief, it is appreciation for the mysteries of life itself, for the beauty of the earth and its critters, for the loving compassion of kinship and friendship, for empathy which is probably the most undervalued of all human attributes. UU theology is about us, as human beings: it is respect for all, for fairness and compassion, for our search for meaning. Surely, we can do better than this flower graphic with “LOVE” as its center to express our religious beliefs.

What Happens When Good People Are Persecuted for Asking the Wrong Questions

A Review by Dick Burkhart of

**“The Canceling of the American Mind: Cancel Culture Undermines Trust and Threatens
Us All – But There is a Solution”**

by Greg Lukianoff & Rikki Schlott, 2023

Lukianoff knows what he is talking about - his organization FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression) maintains a large database of US cancellations and assists with the investigation and resolution of many of them. He was also co-author with Johnathan Haidt of the groundbreaking book “The Coddling of the American Mind” (2018). Lukianoff’s junior author Schlott also works at FIRE. This book brings the reader uptodate in this fast changing scene. Social media is identified as the key to the recent explosion of cancel culture: “it’s nearly impossible to have civil, thoughtful dialogue”.

The political left has constructed a “Perfect Rhetorical Fortress” for both offense and defense, while the right has constructed an “Efficient Rhetorical Fortress”. The former is based on ad-hominem attacks with multiple layers of defense, while the latter is far simpler – it simply tunes out anyone with the wrong opinion, regardless of expertise or well-reasoned critique.

As to cancel culture, “we should consider it part of a dysfunctional way members of our society have learned to argue and battle for power, status, and domination”. In other words it is about winning arguments “without actually winning”; that is, by slander-

ing, deplatforming, etc. All this is illustrated by 11 case studies that span the three parts of the book: (1) What is Cancel Culture? (2) How Cancel Culture Works (3) What to Do About it.

In part II the authors go through the dirty tricks commonly used by both the left and the right:

What-aboutism: Defending against criticism of your side by bringing up the other side's alleged wrongdoing.

Straw-manning: Misrepresenting the opposition's perspective by constructing a weak, inaccurate version of their argument that can be easily refuted.

Minimization: Claiming that the problem doesn't exist or is too small scale to worry about.

Motte & Bailey arguments: Conflating two arguments: a reasonable one (the Motte) and an unreasonable one (the Bailey).

Under-dogging: Claiming that your viewpoint is more valid than your opponent's because you speak for a disadvantaged party.

Accusations of bad faith: Asserting that your opponent is being disingenuous or has a sinister, selfish, or ulterior motive.

Hypocrisy projection: Asserting that your opponent is hypocritical about a given argument without actually checking the consistency of their record.

That's offensive: Responding to an idea you don't like with "that's offensive", rather than engaging with its substance.

Offense archeology: Digging through someone's past comments to find speech that hasn't aged well.

Making stuff up: Fabricating information to bolster a weak argument – and asserting it with confidence.

Then the authors look at some "barricades" of the Perfect Rhetorical Fortress. These are attributes used in ad-hominem attacks to dismiss a speaker rather than argue the evidence on an issue.

Is the speaker conservative? What is the speaker's race? What is the speaker's sex? Is the speaker trans or cis? Is the speaker "phobic"? Are the guilty by association? Did the speaker lose their cool? Did the speaker violate a "thought terminating cliché"? Can you emotionally blackmail someone? Darkly hint that something else is what's really going on.

The Efficient Rhetorical Fortress has its own barricades. Are you "liberal", or have the "wrong opinion", or a journalist, or not MAGA? The key reason for these purity tests, according to author David French, is that "In-group moderates represent a far greater threat to any radical enterprise than out-group opponents", an observation that applies to both the left and the right from any era.

Nevertheless, Lukianoff and Schlott advise that “there is no better way to end intimidation than refusing to be intimidated”. The alternative is that “the ever-present threat of being canceled harms friendships, undermines trust, and fosters paranoia”, turning Gen Z into a “self-insulating” generation. Specifically, “overly involved, anxious parenting meant to help Gen Z succeed has actually done the precise opposite”. The authors have similar advice for corporations and organizations – be proactive in developing resiliency and trust. Consciously avoid cultures of victimhood, trigger warnings, microaggressions, harms, blaming and shaming, etc., in favor of time-tested principles of ethics and psychology.

Their conclusion is that “reinvigorating a Free Speech Culture is also the antidote to authoritarianism”.

From Rev. Barber and Repairers of the Breach

For years, we’ve been fed a pernicious myth that poverty is only an issue for Black people.

This myth not only demeans Black people – with racist images of Black mothers on welfare dominating the imaginations of so many Americans – but also obscures the poverty of tens of millions of white people.

Until we face the reality of white poverty in America, we cannot comprehend what is truly exceptional about the inequality that persists in the richest nation in the history of the world.

That is why I worked with my co-author Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove to write a new book called *White Poverty: How Exposing Myths About Race and Class Can Reconstruct American Democracy*.

In the book, we acknowledge that racism is a persistent problem in America, making rates of poverty higher among most communities of color.

But the same lie that blames Black people for their poverty also prevents us from seeing the pain of poor families who have been offered little more than “whiteness” and angry tweets to sustain them in an economy where the cost of housing, healthcare, education, and transportation have skyrocketed while wages have stagnated for almost all Americans.

When we listen to the hidden wounds of white poverty, they point us toward a reality that touches every race and region of this nation. To face white poverty’s wounds is not to dismiss race. I abhor America’s original sin of racism, but by interrupting the ways race isolates us, I want to flip the conversation we usually have about poverty on its head.

By acknowledging poverty among all people, we can practice what I call *moral fusion*. When we talk about issues impacting poor people, we have to insist that they aren’t matters of left versus right, but right versus wrong. They are moral issues.

At the same time, they are not disconnected. As one example, voter suppression that targets Black folks also hurts poor white people because it prevents politicians from getting elected who would pass policies that lifted all poor people. Fusion is about connecting those people and those issues.



Bishop William Barber II, co-chair, the Poor People's Campaign, speaks outside the U.S. Supreme Court as the justices hear arguments in a legal fight over homelessness and a bid by Grants Pass, Oregon, to enforce local laws against people camping on public property, in Washington, U.S., April 22, 2024.

Image Courtesy: Reuters/Nathan Howard

HELP US BUILD A MORAL FUSION MOVEMENT

By building a moral fusion movement, we can overcome divisions among America's poor and low-wage people and help organize them into one of America's most potent swing votes so that our elected officials can no longer ignore their voices.

I will be speaking about the book and building a moral fusion movement at a series of events in the coming weeks .