



THE DRUUMM BEAT

DIVERSE & REVOLUTIONARY UU MULTICULTURAL MINISTRIES

DECEMBER 2019

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A REFLECTION ON THE BLUU HARPER-JORDAN SYMPOSIUM

by Sana Saeed, DRUUMM President

“Black Liberation Theology is not just for Black people. It's for all people.” Rev. Mykal

My time spent at the BLUU Harper-Jordan Memorial Symposium in late October stays with me this season. It was a space of reconnecting with beloved UU friends and learning.

I felt gratitude for the invitation to spend time in black sacred space and experience BLUU community. I am left also reflecting on Rev. Mykal's words above as I think of our DRUUMM work and hold on to the questions panelists offered:

- What does it mean to center blackness in UU spaces and theology?
- What does it mean for us when society veils off love?
- How can we uplift the idea that the Black liberation theology framework is for all people?
- How do we create or do Black youth programming and POC youth programming where we can support youth to center their joy?
- How can we create youth spaces where BIPOC youth don't have to explain their identity?

I am still excited about all the things the BLUU Organizing Committee has been doing on top of planning this amazing event this Fall, and I am left contemplating how DRUUMM can support BLUU going forth. Were you able to attend the BLUU Harper-Jordan Memorial Symposium? What did you leave with? Share with us at info@druumm.org.

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#TBT



At the ordination of Yielbonzie Johnson in Okalahoma. Mark Morrison-Reed in foreground, Michelle Bentley and William Jones in background.

Courtesy of the Sankofa Special Collection, Yvonne Seon Papers.

RE/CENTERING: UU PEOPLE OF COLOR GROUPS

by Rev. Joseph Santos-Lyons

It is hard to know exactly how many UU People of Color there are in the UUA as we are one of the few North American religious traditions that doesn't conduct a regular demographic census. The best estimates are less than 10%, and perhaps as low as 2%. When I was in seminary and wrote my final thesis, I entitled it "25 to 1" to put into contrast the current numerical experience of White to People of Color in our congregations that make up our daily lived existence as a Unitarian Universalist.

When UU People of Color come together, we often hear how special, historic, and meaningful the moment is. How it has a huge impact on their sense of faith, of being Unitarian Universalist. I have felt the same way, wondering if I'll ever meet another Asian American, the joy in connecting with transracial adoptees, and sharing in the yearning for growing religiously with other Black, Indigenous and People of Color in our liberal religion.

At the center of our UU life is often our local experience of church. In these places, we are seeing a rise in consciousness among UUs about the value of supporting People of Color ministry. We are seeing more intentional spaces that are bringing UU People of Color together to caucus, worship, and cultivate faith formation, as part of the larger ministry of our congregations.

Over the last year, the DRUUMM Organizing Project has been leading a community listening initiative to better understand our broader UU communities of color. One of the unexpected but now strategic developments was identifying and connecting with the UU People of Color groups that are operating in our local congregations. We knew of a few in 2018, and today we've identified over 40 across the US and one in Canada. After a series of one-on-one interviews, we took the input of many to create a religious education module geared towards the facilitators/conveners of these groups. We are calling it Re/Centering.

This fall, we hosted a pilot cohort with 22 facilitator/conveners for a three part monthly Zoom video conference. We created space for peer support, deeper relationships, and guest speakers including Dr. Mark Hicks of the Fahs Collaborative at Meadville Lombard Theological School, Rev. Christina Shu, chaplain and affiliate minister with Neighborhood Church in Pasadena CA, and DRUUMM President Sana Saeed and DRUUMM Outreach Co-Coordinator Noel Burke.

We are planning a new cohort starting in February 2020. If you're organizing a new group, interested in creating a group, or want to learn more about the cohort, let us know at jsantoslyons@uuma.org.

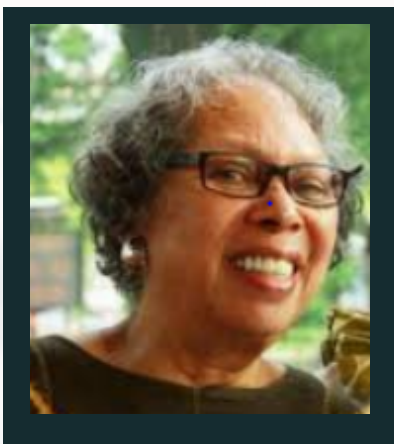
NEW START IN THE INNER CITY

1988 Excerpts by Rev. Yvonne Seon

"As far as we know, Sojourner Truth Congregation represents the first attempt in over fifty years to start a new UU church in a context populated primarily by people not typically included in our movement. Our movement is over 90% white, middle-class, and college educated, in stark contrast to our neighborhood. We fought for this new start in the inner city because we are convinced that it is in the city that our social and religious values confront the realities of modern life in a way that most challenges us to exciting, new growth. Certainly, the vision is catching on as the UUA plans similar new start congregations in Tulsa, OK, Chicago, IL, and Atlanta, GA. The vision is catching on for UU's who have heard about the idea and have committed to support it in various ways. Our members come to Sojourner Truth Congregation because it is 'an intentionally diverse religious community,' reaching out by reaching in!"

"A second principle we have found for our new start in the inner city is that we must find ways to make people feel comfortable in our midst -- even when it makes us uncomfortable to do so. Most of us are discovering that we can expand our comfort zones with practice. For example, we often include traditional spirituals among our music selections. The theology expressed in these songs and the language, often make UU's uncomfortable. But the music awakens powerful responses for most African-Americans because of the memories and cultural history reflected. So, we modify the words when we can, and try to share the emotions when we can't get the words 'right.' We try to confront issues that speak to different constituency interest/values as we plan Sunday services or give examples in our service. We try to allow those who come to feel comfortable being who they are by making it clear that 'to love is our covenant'; i.e., to love unconditionally. So, the young come with the old; we come dressed up or dressed 'down'; we come agreeing and disagreeing with the minister and with one another; we come as singles or as couples - and we find comfort and community

- because we care for one another;
- because we are willing to trust one another;
- because we are willing to insist on listening to one another."



Rev. Yvonne Reed Seon is the first African American Women ordained in Unitarian Universalism (1981). She served the Sojourner Truth Congregation in Washington DC. These excerpts are from "New Start in the Inner City" Delivered October 2, 1988 at the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia. Seon currently works as an associate professor of history at Prince George's Community College in Largo, Maryland. Read Rev. Seon's papers in the Sankofa Special Collection, an archive of BIPOC UU history at Meadville Lombard.

SPIRIT OF YEARNINGS



If we are going to take the “Happy Holidays” approach to this time of year then let it include the spirit of: a community who chose to keep the faith in the midst of war for self-autonomy and determination, a God who continuously sides with the rejected and outcasted, and a people who continuously struggle for freedom on a land stolen from others by a culture which would have them enslaved. If your well wishes this season don’t include the spirit of yearnings and doings of collective liberation, then I don’t want them. Because while feeling jolly is good, embodying a resilient hope is better.

- Byron Tyler Coles

CONVERSATIONS FOR LIBERATION: AN INVITATION

by Sana Saeed

Since the summer of 2019, I along with Ayanna have been meeting with the UUA and colleagues from various organizations to address conflicts arising in Unitarian Universalist communities around the call to dismantle white supremacy in our faith movement. Meetings led to a framework and an invitation for Unitarian Universalist faith communities to engage in broad, shared discussion: How will we move our faith forward toward greater justice? Read the invitation below and consider using the discussion guide* in your small groups or congregations.

AN INVITATION TO CONVERSATIONS FOR LIBERATION

We are at a moment of great power and potential in Unitarian Universalism. Unitarian Universalists have charted a new path to create a faith movement where people of all backgrounds and identities can thrive to challenge systems of oppression, patriarchy and white supremacy at all levels.

We have begun to make progress in reimagining and diversifying our leadership and our communities to make good on the promise that generations of our faith forebears have made. At General Assembly 2019 in Spokane, WA, the change was seen and recognized from the stage, among attendees and in programs and worship, embodying the theme of “The Power of We.”



We also recognize that meaningful change is hard, especially as it relates to identity and power which raises essential questions about whose voices are heard, who is asked to take risks, how we negotiate our relationships, and what our priorities are as a community. False divisions like “political correctness” versus “inclusive speech,” or the question of whether to focus critiques inward in our communities versus outward toward the world, distract from the core calling of our faith to move toward equity and compassion in every way. Using this common framework, UUs can engage faithfully in their own congregations and communities, and then bring their discussions on the future of our faith to the wider Association. As you engage in Conversations for Liberation in your communities, we invite you to honor these three core commitments, grounded in Unitarian Universalist values:

We Recommit Ourselves To The Aspiration Of A Fully Inclusive And Anti-Opressive Community

This is an essential calling that arises from our Principles and theology. We recognize oppressive systems as violations of human dignity, demanding we challenge them both within and beyond our congregations. Systems of oppression hurt and dehumanize us all. We acknowledge that we are a part of the interdependent web of existence, and that none of us are truly free until we are all liberated from oppression.

We Recenter The Truth Telling That Comes From Voices At The Margins Of Our Faith Community

The call to spiritual maturity and growth means listening to marginalized voices, and to create brave space where these truths can be held. The circle of faith community grows wider from the margins, not the center. We value the leadership and wisdom of people who are trans and/or nonbinary, those who are disabled, people of color and Indigenous people, those who are poor, and all who have historically been and continue to be in oppressed communities.

We Reaffirm That We Must Lead From The Covenant Of Care That Binds Us

We must hold each other in love and kindness, including when we do not agree. We have to take responsibility for the impacts of our voices, processes and actions as we engage with the expectation of growth and learning. No one is disposable.

Unitarian Universalism is no place for name-calling, dismissal, gaslighting and arguments that undermine and erase. With humility, we must affirm one another’s humanity, even in times of frustration, heartbreak and trauma. Together, we must dig deeper to advance our shared aspiration towards a Unitarian Universalism that practices the liberating values of our theology.

**Tools and resources for Conversations for Liberation are available at www.uua.org/conversations, supporting each of these three commitments. Every UU group and community is encouraged to set aside time for listening and sharing in small groups, using the discussion guide with questions that were posed about The Power of We at General Assembly. We also recognize that the discussion framework has strengths and limitations for use by BIPOC. We welcome your feedback to pass on to the UUA. Please email president@DRUUMM.org with any feedback.*

CELEBRATING THE FAMILIAR

by Tuli Patel

When I first came to the United States, I had just turned 23. It was the late 1980s. Beginning a master's degree in a small liberal arts college in New England was far easier than figuring out which side of the street to stand on to catch the bus home or what the percentage sign on a carton of milk meant. My enculturation was rapid and not particularly hard. Harder to adjust to was what seemed to be a diaspora – Indians coming over to this brave new world escaping not necessarily persecution, but the tethers of poverty, limited education, censored libraries, and economic hardship. The promise and pursuit of a better life beckoned. I was immediately cast in the minority – I had nothing to escape from; no reason to be here that involved escaping something; I was here because of a hunger to learn, to round out my education, and take back to my birth-land what I had learned and so transform the world. I ended up staying, but that story is for another time.



Everywhere I looked, my fellow Indians having chosen to fly half way across the planet, seemed to be re-creating the very worlds they were trying to get away from. They gathered not only as Indians, but within that nationality, by ethnic group; chattering in local dialects, humming tunes from Hindi films, cooking up aromatic feasts that evoked for them not just a country left behind, but the warmth, acceptance and love of a close-knit family.

They were drawing a circle bounded by all that they were familiar with and longed for. Before my very eyes a graduate-student-from-India colony was emerging. I was witness to an emerging culture that I wanted no part of but yet was somehow bound to, not out of choice, but simply because of my background.

In the face of this attempt at preserving ethnic bonds, I did the only thing I knew – I rejected this emerging world outright. “That’s not for me!” I said with indignation, “I’ve come to America to study and widen my horizons. Why would I want to spend time with anything or anybody that I am already familiar with?” I drew a circle, bounded by a hard line, around me and my “American” world. There was no place within that boundary for anything that might hark back to my birthplace.

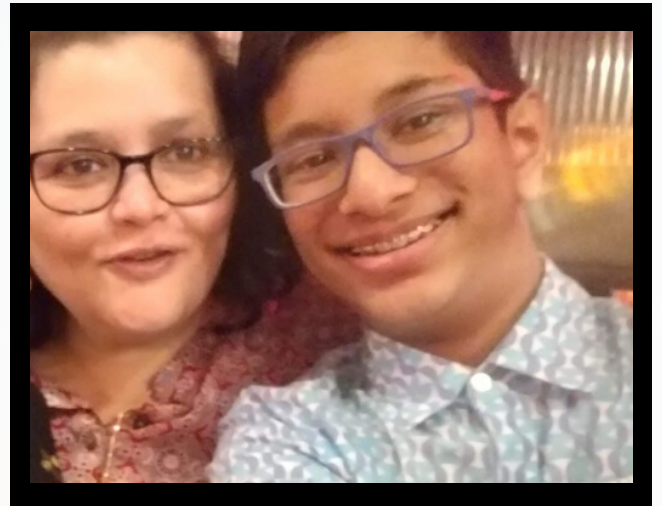
I stepped with the conviction of my superiority and elite world, into the circle of welcome extended to me by Americans, by Unitarians, by fellow non-Indian students. What I failed to acknowledge, was what it might take for a stranger, one from a far-flung corner of a country left behind, to extend a hand to me, that aloof and arrogant Bombay chick, who seemed to think she knew it all and had it all. I also did not see that there might be a world that was wonderful, and full of love, warmth and acceptance and that it was being handed to me; that it was mine to claim if ever I wanted it; that the circle drawn by my fellow country mates was permeable while mine was dense and impenetrable.

In the Hindu epic, the Ramayana, Ram and Sita are banished for 14 years into the forest by a jealous step mother. When he steps out to hunt for food, Ram draws a circle around their hut, to keep Sita safe. Sita is warned to not step over the line, to cross the bounds of that demarcation etched in sand. She is lured by evil and steps over the line, and so ensues a battle of good versus evil and although it turns out more or less okay in the end, Sita is somehow tainted by the risk she took in crossing over that line.

And so this Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, I will light a lamp and as I do I will join many other Indians, for once-a-year food and firecrackers, lights and worship offerings, in a celebration that I am invited to be part of, and will no longer turn away from.

As I do so, I am reminded of these words by A. Powell Davies:

Here we are – all of us – all upon this planet, bound together in a common destiny,
Living our lives between the briefness of the daylight and the dark.
Kindred in this, each lighted by the same precarious, flickering flame of life,
how does it happen that we are not kindred in all things else?
How strange and foolish these walls of separation that divide us.



Tuli Patel is Executive Director at Beacon UU Congregation in Summit, NJ, responsible for financial management and lifespan education. She was introduced to UUism her first weekend in the US and has attended at congregations in Oak Park, Kirkwood, Mo, Belmont MA and Los Angeles, CA. She is shown here with her 13 year old son. She has another 21 year old.

DRUUMM Gatherings 2020

San Diego, Raleigh-Durham, Atlanta, Seattle



DRUUMM is working with local organizers to host a series of gatherings in January 2020. As the Organizing Project enters a second year, we are learning and building with our broader network of Unitarian Universalist People of Color Groups based in our local congregations and communities. We have heard clearly the deep desire for community and connection going back to our origins as an organization. These gatherings are a place to share food and worship, hold critical conversations, and build deeper relationships between Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) UU's in ways that heal and support our faith formation. These events are free, and open to all BIPOC UU. Please RSVP in advance with the respective local organizer.

Sunday January 12, 2020
San Diego, California
RSVP Jan at JanCT@cox.net

Saturday January 18, 2020
Durham, North Carolina
RSVP Diane
cantu99797@aol.com

Sunday January 19, 2020
Atlanta, Georgia
RSVP Ayanna
vp@druumm.org

Sunday January 26, 2020
Seattle, Washington
RSVP Rhonda
rm.brown2456@yahoo.com



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MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

WILL YOU JOIN US AS WE
COMMIT OURSELVES TO
LIVING FULLY INTO OUR
VALUES?

NOTATIONS

- Registration is open for Finding Our Way Home, the annual gathering of UU Religious Professionals of Color. This year it is being hosted in Long Beach, California, March 18-21, 2020.
- Marisol Caballero announced a new resource for congregations to engage with questions about cross-cultural engagement and how identity plays into local organizing. Created in collaboration with the UUA's International Office.
- The UU Ministers Association is considering substantial changes to the ministerial code of conduct. The new POCI Ministers Chapter will be hosting several discussion sessions in early 2020.
- The DRUUMM GA 2020 program in Providence, Rhode Island next June will include an intentional Indigenous programs track.
- The DRUUMM Beat will be announcing new folks who are coming on board to support our monthly publication.

COLOR/FULL



RUPIA LAMARR

GOAL

I came here as a representative of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Northeastern India. To participate in the observation of the 450th anniversary of the Edict of Torda. The Edict of Torda is the law that was passed by the town of Torda in Transylvania. That was a time when King Sigismund was the only Unitarian king in history. He passed a law of religious freedom. At that time in history, January 1468, the Law was known as Edict of Torda. Congregations and churches got to decide if they liked what was being preached by their minister. It was a very significant thing. The king said, "Faith is a gift of god. You are free to believe in anything you want to believe."

GIFT

We tell our story about how the church in my place came about. The founder of the church, H.K. Singh, who was converted to the Welsh Calvinist Church, realized that he was against the teachings of damnation. He started searching, and in the process he met a Unitarian minister in Calcutta who sent him reading materials about Unitarianism. He founded the church in September 1887.



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