



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF ARLINGTON VIRGINIA

A Place to Connect, Grow and Serve

UU's Racial History & our need for the 8th Principle

If the 8th Principle is adopted by our congregation (**** please vote March 31!**), it will require us to “*accountably dismantle racism in our selves and our institutions.*” This is second in a series that examines how institutionalized white supremacy has undermined Unitarian Universalists of color throughout our history.



UU's Racial History – Part 2, the 1940-1950's

The Unitarians passed a “Resolution on Race Relations” in 1942, however little changed for Black Ministers and congregants. The second Black man ordained as a Unitarian was the [Rev. Lewis McGee](#) in 1943, after he had spent 20 years as an African Methodist Episcopal minister. When Unitarian congregations in Illinois would not accept the leadership of a Black minister, in 1947 McGee and his wife founded the Free Religious Fellowship on the south-side of Chicago, which remains UU's longest-standing historically Black congregation. Ten years later, in 1957, McGee was considered for a position in Flint, Michigan, but did not receive the necessary two-thirds of the congregation's vote to become minister. He soon after moved to California to take an assistant minister position at First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles. Finally, in 1961, McGee became the first Black man to serve as a senior minister in a mostly white congregation, at the Chico Unitarian Fellowship.

Other African Americans who sought a home in Unitarian Universalism in this era also had a hard time finding their place in UU congregations. When in 1935 Jeffrey Campbell graduated from Saint Lawrence University, the Universalists could not find a congregation willing to settle him, nor, in 1937, could the Unitarians. The same was true for Black ministers Alvin Neeley Cannon who was ordained in 1945, Eugene Sparrow ordained in 1949, and initially for David Eaton ordained in 1959, and Thom Payne ordained in 1970.

In 1954, the American Unitarian Association *Commission on Intergroup Relations* reported that 52 of 176 Unitarian congregations responding to a national survey had Black congregants; of those, only 13 churches had more than five Black members. The report recommended that the next Unitarian General Assembly be held at a historically Black college – to raise awareness of Black intellectuals about the Unitarian faith – but no action was subsequently taken.

Data from 1968 showed that there were 8 Black UU Ministers, yet only two were settled in congregations, one of them part-time. At that time, there were an estimated 1,500 Black UU congregants nation-wide (of an approximate 175,000 UUs overall).

Next up: *UU's Racial History – Part 3, the civil rights era through the 1970's*

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References:

“UU Racial Diversity Timeline” <https://www.geo.sunysb.edu/UU-history/racial.htm>

“Black History of Unitarian Universalism: We Shape Our Faith Together” [Susan Lawrence](#), UUA website, February 8, 2018.

“The black hole in the white UU psyche” Mark Morrison-Reed, UU World, Fall 2017.
UUA 1967 [Report of the Committee on Goals](#).

** FAQs and other resources on the 8th Principle and related issues are available on our [Eight Principle Task Force Facebook page](#).