

Our congregation will **vote on March 31 whether to adopt the 8th Principle**. If adopted, we will commit to “*accountably dismantle racism in our selves and our institutions.*” This third in a series that considers UU’s racial history is meant to ground our efforts to create a Beloved community in an understanding of how UU white identity has developed, crowding out movements by people of color to claim space in Unitarian Universalism.



UU’s Racial History – Part 3, the 1960-1980’s

After more than 200 UUs joined Martin Luther King at the infamous Selma march, the UUA [established a “Freedom Fund,”](#) which from 1965-67 paid for the legal defense of church members arrested for sit-in, financed the work of the Freedom Riders, and covered expenses for civil rights cases.

However, following the 1967 race riots, UU’s were divided about the civil rights and black power movements. The UUA convened an emergency conference on “the Unitarian Universalist Response to the Black Rebellion,” attended by 135 participants in New York. As the meeting got started, 30 of the 37 African American delegates formed a Black UU Caucus, and Caucus developed a list of “non-negotiable demands” that were to be submitted to the UUA Board of Trustees. At the top of this list was a request that the Board establish a Black Affairs Council (BAC), with funding of \$250,000 a year for four years. While the conference voted to accept the Caucus’ demands, some participants left the meeting in protest. Cornelius McDougald, chair of the UUA Commission on Religion and Race, co-founded a rival group, the “Black and White Alternative,” and for the next decade the acronyms BAC and BAWA signified a deep division in UU history.

Divisions continued to grow, and while funds for BAC were approved at the 1968 General Assembly, [there was a tense stand-off at the 1969 GA](#) about how that funding should be used. As many as 200 Black UU delegates and their white supporters walked out of GA over the disagreement. Soon after, the UUA’s overall financial condition worsened, and funds for BAC were never allocated. Much acrimony ensued, and by 1970 BAC had ceased to function.

Ten years later, UU scholarship contained little of the history of African Americans in Unitarian Universalism. The 1975 publication *A Short History of American Unitarianism* contains only two sentences about Egbert Ethelred Brown, the first Black Unitarian minister, and no other mention of African Americans in UU history. While the title *Freedom Moves West: A History of the Western Unitarian Conference, 1852–1952* mentions the Free Religious Fellowship as a predominantly Black congregation in Chicago, it mistakenly identifies Euro-American Kenneth Patton as one of its organizers. Similarly, white novelist Celia Parker Woolley is credited as the founder of the Fredrick Douglass Center in Chicago, but her African American co-founder Fannie Barrier Williams is not mentioned. Not until *Been in the Storm So Long* was published in 1991

did a collection of readings by Black UUs exist. And not until 1993, with the appearance of *Singing the Living Tradition*, did African American culture make a significant appearance in a UU hymnbook.

In 1987 the UUA established an Affirmative Action Task Force, which started bringing in more Black ministers, many who had been ordained by other religions. In 1989 the African American UU Ministries was founded, and then in 1997 DRUUM (Diverse and Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries) evolved. Religious professionals of color continue to gather annually, and in 2017 drew from a list of 250 ministers, religious educators, musicians, administrators, and seminarians of color. According to Mark Morrison-Reed, a pre-eminent scholar of Black UU history, the number of UU ministers of color is now doubling approximately every twelve years.

Next up: ***UU's Racial History – Part 4, 2015 to today***

References:

“The UUA meets black power: BAC vs. BAWA, 1967–1971.” UU World, March/April 2000.

“The empowerment tragedy.” Mark Morrison-Reed, UU World, Winter 2011.

“The black hole in the white UU psyche” Mark Morrison-Reed, UU World, Fall 2017.

Black Lives of UU 2017 Convening - An Intimate Conversation Dr. Mtangulizi Sanyika.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVpP4cBGumM>

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

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