

Excerpted from *Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry*, Mitra Rahnema, Editor. ©2017 Committee for Antiracism, Anti-oppression, and Multiculturalism of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association

Rev. Darrick Jackson:

"The intellectualism in Unitarian Universalism comes with a culture of stillness. We are expected to sit quietly in our seats, listen intently with no emotion on our faces, no movement in our bodies. We are supposed to wait until after the service to express ourselves. I grew up in a culture of engagement. We had permission to respond to the service, to say Amen when we were moved by the words or music, to clap our hands and smile and nod our heads whenever the spirit moved us. We lived the hymn "When the Spirit Says Do" every time we gathered for worship. I have had to learn to restrain myself in UU circles, which distances me from the worship. Sometimes our worship feels more like a lecture to me. The first time I preached at a UU congregation, I was unsure of how my sermon was being received because there was no visible response. It wasn't until after the service that I learned that people did enjoy the sermon. Even now, I get slightly unnerved by the lack of response. I construct my services with UU stillness in mind; any attempt at a more embodied worship feels experimental and risky instead of one of many ways worship happens. I have always loved youth and young adult worship, as those services are generally more heart- and soul-centered and invite engagement and connection. Engaging UUs in conversation about these areas where I feel disconnected from the UU culture is hard. I often struggle with how to say something, or if it is worth it. I worry about the other person's reaction, and I have to decide if I have the energy to deal with it. Often when I engage with someone about these matters, the conversation quickly turns to them (how they feel about it, how they are not to blame, and so on); instead of engaging the issue, I'm engaging their needs."

Rev. Lilia Cuervo:

"Once I liberate my mind, my body feels free to move, to clap, to feel alive during worship. My heart aches seeing so many people in our pews restraining their desire to give in to joy through movement, frozen by fear of judgment. That is why, in my first sermon at First Parish in Cambridge, I promised that sooner or later I would have them dancing. I fulfilled my promise, and it was a happy day for me when, during a Day of the Dead service, five couples spontaneously, one by one, proceeded to dance in the aisles to the mariachi music. Just by being present, a minister of color not only changes the makeup of a congregation but, if allowed to exercise leadership, helps over time to create an environment in which transformation can happen in small and big ways."