

**Liberating Faith: The Intersection of Anti-racism, Anti-oppression and Multi-culturalism in the Unitarian Universalist Association
(Work in Progress)**

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Abstract

No religious movement can thrive without a vibrant ever renewed commitment to religious education. Thus, nurturing spiritual and intellectual growth for children, youth and adults remains one of the most compelling challenges facing faith communities including Unitarian Universalists in the twenty-first century. However, adding the lack of diversity to religion and religious education is a very sobering thought when we pause to reflect on the realization that 11AM on Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour in America. This essay identifies and discusses the social, psychological, and theological foundations of Unitarian Universalists religious education through the lens of anti-racism, anti-oppression and multi-culturalism. Because the implications of RE in culturally diverse congregations (multicultural) and culturally specific (monocultural) congregations is such a compelling issue in light of the lack of diversity, this essay includes an overview of Unitarian Universalism's efforts with both models and Davies Memorial UU Congregation (multicultural) to examine the efficacy of the model. Additionally, this research paper provides an overview of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) as a window into understanding the diversity landscape of UUism and its attempts to diversify its congregations and membership, including an overview of UUA's religious education approach toward diversity.

Introduction

No religious movement can thrive without a vibrant ever renewed commitment to religious education. Thus, nurturing spiritual and intellectual growth for children, youth and adults remains one of the most compelling challenges facing faith communities including Unitarian Universalists in the twenty-first century. However, adding the lack of diversity to religion and religious education is a very sobering thought when we pause to reflect on the realization that 11AM on Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour in America. The following essay identifies and discusses the social, psychological, and theological foundations of Unitarian Universalists religious education through the lens of anti-racism, anti-oppression and multi-culturalism. Because the implications of RE in culturally diverse congregations (multicultural) and culturally specific (monocultural) congregations is such a compelling issue in light of the lack of diversity this paper will include an overview of Unitarian Universalism's efforts with both models and Davies Memorial UU Congregation (multicultural) to examine the efficacy of the model. Additionally, this research paper will provide an overview of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) as a window into understanding the diversity landscape of UUism and its attempts to diversify its congregations and membership. This research also includes an overview of UUA's religious education approach, including an overview of the history of religious education in the UUA. The thesis guiding this research is that while multicultural curriculum reflects the vision for UU congregations, the social, psychological and theological foundations of RE are not clearly articulated or accessible.

Review of the Relevant Literature

The review of the relevant literature focuses on an overview to anti-racist/anti-oppressive and multiculturalism in the UUA with a focus on some of its key efforts to achieve diversity through culturally diverse and culturally specific congregations. For the purpose of this research the writer will only examine UU initiatives. This review will also include an examination of two case studies: 1) Davies Memorial UU Congregation and 2). Finally, this section will include an overview on the history of multicultural f Religious education in this country and finally, an overview of the development of religious education in UUism with a focus on social, psychological and theological foundations .

Intersection of Anti-racism, Anti-oppression and Multi-culturalism in the Unitarian Universalist Association

In 1988, the Reverend Mark Morrison-Reed, an African-American raised UU since early childhood, preached a sermon in Detroit titled, “How Open the Door? How Loud the Call?” His sermon reviewed the history of UU congregations that had successfully integrated from the early 1900s to the 1970s. Morrison-Reed identified five common characteristics in these successfully integrated congregations: 1) All were in large urban areas (New York, Chicago and Washington, DC) where religious preference could be pursued because family and group ties were less powerful; 2) The areas all had a large black middle class; 3) the ministers and congregations were “visibly and vocally concerned with issues of race relations and justice, thus the church became identified as one sympathetic with the African American agenda; 4) Each congregation took intentional and, specific actions to open their doors and to be inclusive; and 5) It took

time to achieve racial diversity. However, in spite of the efforts of these “integrated congregations” Unitarian Universalism continues to experience challenges in successfully recruiting and retaining African-Americans and other people of color.¹ Despite the theological and ideological challenges that some African-Americans experience and the exposure to racism, there are others who flourish in the UU culture. Reverend Bill Sinkford, the first African-American President, elected by the UUA is such an example. His spiritual journey has taken him from atheist to theist minister, and now to President of the small but powerful movement of Unitarian Universalists.

The Unitarian Universalists Black Empowerment Era

Our history in regards to racial justice is brave enough to make you proud, tragic enough to make you cry, and inept enough to make you laugh once anger passes.²

For the Unitarian Universalist Association there were many issues around the inclusion of Blacks as members that posed challenges in a racially conscious society, especially in the Southern black congregations. Despite their loyalty and proven leadership, many Black Unitarian Universalists have encountered pain and adversity in their chosen faith of Unitarian Universalism. Most reports reveal the subtle effects of racism and the unpleasant reality of simply being the “only one” or one of a few. The

¹ I will use the term, “people of color” to refer to individuals that claim their ancestral roots among African American, Caribbean, Native American, Pacific Islanders, Middle eastern, and Latina/Latino. Using the definition developed by Rev. Joseph Santos-Lyons, People of Color reflects a term that is tied to an analysis of anti-racism in which a part of the strategy includes accountability to a larger community of people of color UUs. His definition includes three components: 1) self identify with one aspect of ones identity that is not of European/White descent; 2) seen as, in part or whole, as a Person of Color by society and is connected to cultural practices, language shared resistance against oppression, active solidarity with other Persons of Color and consciousness about white privilege and white supremacy on communities of color and 3) live as, in part or whole, a Person of Color in the larger world. I note the disagreement by UU Latinos/Latinas in the use of the word and also acknowledge my willingness to be in conversation over those differences.

² These oft quoted words originated with Reverend Mark Morrison-Reed and have been attributed to a sermon by him.

insensitivities and unwillingness to embrace change has in some instances created tensions between black Unitarian Universalists and white Unitarian Universalists. Two controversies involving Blacks highlight some of these tensions: 1) open membership, and 2) the Black Empowerment Era.

Open Membership

At the 1963 General Assembly one of the issues addressed was the exclusionary practices of African-Americans in several rural Southern Universalist congregations. This proposal, intended to exclude the congregations that were excluding blacks, was defeated. Congregational polity, the right to self governance and autonomy, was at the heart of this defeat. The overwhelming majority of the UU membership opposed exclusion of blacks in southern congregations. However, there was a stronger belief in the freedom of religion and therefore an unwillingness to excommunicate or take actions against individuals engaging in racism.³ To do so some believed, challenged congregational polity.

The second controversy that challenged Black and White UUs was the years known as the Black Empowerment Era. In the opinion of many UUs, this period was one of the most painful in the history of black and white relations. In 1970, Sinkford, along with a number of African American members, left UUism. Many never returned, thus causing the demise of several inner-city UU congregations.⁴ Sinkford was among those who reconciled and returned ten years later. The external environment in October, 1967

³ The Commission on Appraisal of the Unitarian Universalist Association, *Interdependence: Renewing Congregational Polity* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1997), 140.

⁴ Victor Carpenter, "Black Empowerment-Oral History Project" (speech delivered at 43rd General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Long Beach California, 24-28 June 2004).

in this country had been filled with “a summer of racially-charged riots and a perceived rending of American society.”⁵ In response, the UUA’s Commission on Religion and Race convened an, “Emergency Conference on UU Response to the Black Rebellion” at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City. The Black UU Caucus (BUUC) was created during that conference. BUUC worked over the next year on a proposal recommending an annual budget of \$250,000 to be allocated over a four year period. The proposal was designed to address racial injustices. The proposal was presented at the 1968 General Assembly in Cleveland and approved, despite the growing financial problems of the UUA. In hindsight, multiple factors have been identified that contributed to the escalation of racial tensions within UUA. The 1997 Report of the UUA Commission on Appraisal noted several factors: 1) “the strong passions and competing ideologies about how racial parity should be approached, 2) self-empowerment strategies” of the stakeholders that included the Black Affairs council (BAC), the Black Unitarian Universalist Caucus (BUUCC), and Black and White Alternative (BAWA); 3) “existing structures of governance and presumed consensus about how the business of the Association should be carried out” and 4) questions of power and control about UU identity and who speaks for the UUA. In recent times a number of efforts have been initiated to heal the still infectious wounds of the Black Empowerment Era. They include: 1) conversations with participants held on January 20, 2001 at Starr King School for the Ministry, 2) a series of forums and discussions held at the 2004 General Assembly that included many of the original participants in the controversial Black Empowerment meeting in 1963, including Mtangalesi AKA Hayward Henry, Victor Carpenter,

⁵ Ibid.

Efforts towards Racial Diversity

In 1994 over 500 UU's, including 100 UU's of color, were interviewed by telephone by UUA staff and consultants to gain an understanding of the attitudes and activities on congregational diversity. That study indicated that the attitude and support of the ministers are critical to congregation's efforts to achieve diversity.

In 1995, just over 200 UU ministers were interviewed by telephone to gain insights into general about ministers roles and responsibilities to achieve diversity. Over seventy percent of UU's interviewed thought that it is possible for their congregations to become more culturally diverse, more racially diverse or both. The survey findings concluded noted that intentionality is required to become more diverse. The research further indicated that in order for genuine change to take place the congregation and the minister would have to work together to prioritize diversity in the life of the congregation and to place it on the congregation's agenda. The research clearly indicated that it is critical for ministers and congregations to be intentional about doing diversity work together. In the same study, fear was cited as the key factor that stops individuals from moving forward on diversity issues. Some of the specific fears and the percentage of ministers were indicated as follows:

- We would settle for a token level of diversity 44%
- We have not yet dealt adequately with our own prejudice 34%
- People will be uncomfortable with the possibility of conflict 31%
- We are all afraid of what we don't know 30%
- We will lose our sense of being a safe and healing community if there is racial or cultural conflict 26%
- We aren't really committed to knowing diverse people as human beings 26%

Although roughly three in ten ministers indicated they had no concerns if their congregations were to try to become more racially diverse, ministers expressed the following fears:

- Fear of conflict/lack of understanding 19%
- Failure/lack of commitment/follow-through 15%
- Resistance to/fear of change 15%

In another survey, Reverend Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, an African-American minister that served as a Consultant to the UUA, interviewed twenty-eight individuals from five congregations started by African-American UU ministers. The survey identified the common profile of the African-American members as, “people in historically Black churches who are unhappy with a dogmatic theology; and authoritarian structures.” These same individuals, contended Bowen-Wheatley, were attracted to UUism because they “are in search of a place where spiritual or theological diversity is encouraged.” The two conditions identified by Bowens-Wheatley that would in fact contribute to the increased successful recruitment of African-Americans were the following:

1. a greater tolerance for theist perspectives and honoring the fact that the experience of Jesus has been a source of great inspiration in the African-American community and
2. an educational process on issues of polity – one that values the positive contributions of the Black church.⁶

According to Bowens-Wheatley, the lack of acknowledgement of a collective decision-making process within congregations is disruptive and unhealthy for congregational growth. She noted the difficulties in building multicultural congregations. Her findings indicated that training was clearly needed for clergy, lay leaders and the new

⁶ Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, *New Start Congregations Report: An Assessment*. Boston, MA: UUA, Congregational, District and Extension Services Department, 2000, photocopied.

start covenant congregations. Training recommendations emphasized valuing and honoring differences in context, worship and administrative styles, comparative polity, including the pros and cons of how UU congregations are governed and special emphasis on context that is racial, cultural and class differences in leadership.

Because of the lack of success in growing intentionally diverse congregations the UUA appears to have no further plans to pursue the planting of intentionally diverse congregations. However, the organic emergence of congregational diverse communities is a strong candidate for success and will be discussed at length in a later section. This same report cites the UUA/Congregation's District and Extension Services staff's inexperience in growing intentionally diverse congregations. The UUA had little experience or programmatic support on how to build or sustain intentionally diverse congregations. As a result they inadvertently contributed to their demise through their insistence on diversity of membership, as well as placing ministers of color in new congregational settings rather than considering other ministries where they might have been more successful. In some instances the resistance and hostility to the minister was one of the factors that contributed to the failed outcome. Finally, the inadequate financial support posed problems with sustainability which may have inadvertently created a dependency relationship between UUA and intentionally diverse congregations as noted by the UUA. There was also a stronger interest in building multicultural congregations among European Americans than among African-Americans.⁷ There were competing perspectives about congregational focus and identity among clergy and laity about what it meant or how it would work to be diverse or multicultural. Some organizing ministers

⁷ The report failed to provide an explanation about why blacks had less enthusiasm about diversity.

and/or the congregation felt disempowered and constrained by the decisions, attitudes and assumptions of others – either the covenanting congregation, the UUA or the District.

One of the critical strategies supported by UUA and the Veatch Program, a UU foundation, to promote racial and cultural diversity was support for persons of color moving into ministry, including transfers from other denominations. In 1998-99 financial support was provided for seven interns of color. UUA also supported two “first ministries” for fellowshipped UU ministers of color. These time limited grants in settings which provided maximum professional formation opportunities, were tailored to the specific needs of the ministers and congregations. In previous years the Department of Congregations, District and Extension Services offered support for congregations whose mission focused on ministry to persons of color. The focus was instead a “diversity of congregations” rather than merely racially diverse congregations. The six congregations that participated in this program at the conclusion of 1999 were:

- Tahlequah, Oklahoma – This congregation “graduated” from their ministry support program with a membership of 1/3 Native American located in the capital of the Cherokee Nation;
- Palisades, New Jersey – intentionally racially and culturally diverse; was the successful internship site for a minister of color;
- San Jose, California – two ministries – one English speaking, one Spanish speaking – in one congregation;
- Durham, North Carolina – intentionally racially and culturally diverse; previously served by an African-American minister and continues to be the only intentionally diverse congregation planted in the Thomas Jefferson District;
- Rainier Valley, Washington – intentionally, racially and culturally diverse and;
- Chicago, Illinois – The ministry at the Church of the Open Door was inclusive and included a focus on the bisexual/gay/lesbian community of color on the south side of Chicago. The congregation was served by an African American lesbian couple who have dual standing as UU ministers and United Church of Christ. It has since closed its doors.

Having experienced disproportionate failures in its intentionally diverse startups, Congregational District and Extension Services (CDE) began requiring proof of self-sufficiency, and strong district and covenanting congregational financial support before accepting congregations into its program. Financial support became time-limited and they have now moved completely away from creating small diverse congregations that inevitably became dependent on UUA for financial support. Instead, the UUA is currently invested in large start ups that include large investments of capital that are fully staffed, opening the doors with approximately three hundred members. This model unfortunately has not proven to be successful at this point in time. It may simply be that it is too early to determine.

An early strategy intended to diversify the membership of UUism was the creation of congregations to be served by African-American ministers who entered the UU ministry during the 1980s. Although this approach proved to be successful in the creation of initial pulpits for ministers of color, it was not successful in creating self sustaining racially diverse congregations. Unfortunately, most of these congregations have either closed or are in nesting relationships with other UU congregations. At a UUA Field Staff, Big Complex Meeting in December 2000 in Boston, then UUA President, John Buhrens stated that there have been no recent success stories of intentionally diverse congregations besides All Souls in Washington D.C. originally pastured by Reverend E. Powell Davies and later by Rev. David Eaton. In addition is the Community Church in New York City, The Church of the Open Door in Chicago, Illinois, and co-pastored by Reverend Irma Crawford and Reverend Karen Hutt was an example of a congregation whose mission was to serve the African American GLBTQ community. Unfortunately, it

has since closed. However, in its outreach efforts it was also targeting the middle eastern community that resided in the nearby area. Buhrens further noted that he is not sure that UUs know how to create intentionally diverse congregations. Sometimes, he said, our motivations are tainted by paternalism. Leadership and personnel issues are still a major limitation he further noted. He stated that diversity of ministry staff teams apparently existed at one point but had now been disbanded. UUism as a denomination and movement remains ninety-one to ninety-eight percent European American. Sinkford contends that he is not, “trying to find a few more dark faces so the white persons sitting in the pews will feel better about themselves.” Yet clearly the intent is to encourage more racial and cultural diversity within the ranks of UUism.

In 2002 John Crestwell, now Reverend John Crestwell and Reverend Dr. Richard Speck, Joseph Priestley District Executive of the UUA engaged in the following conversation in response to Crestwell’s excited utterance that he wanted to start an African American Unitarian Universalist congregation. Speck’s response, borne out of a history of failed attempts was as follows, “We’ve tried starting churches with African American ministers and most of them failed miserably. I’m about to lose a church this week (Sojourner Truth) that was started by an African American (Yvonne Chappelle Seon). . . Our religion has struggled placing misers of color. We have a checkered past but we are working on it. We’ve not done well with this. . .”⁸ On the journey toward actualizing his dream of starting a congregation, Crestwell shifted away from a culturally specific model for African American UUs to a multicultural model. However, his rationale and insights about UUA’s “failed history” of diversity still bear noting for their

⁸ John Thomas Crestwell, Jr, *The Charge of the Chalice: The Davies Memorial Unitarian Universalist Church Growth and Diversity Story* (Camp Springs, MD: Movement Ministries, 2007), 10.

insights about an institutional pattern: “In the case of Davies Church, I felt this was a situation where the UUA had been made gun-shy from failed diversity projects of the past. Those failed for a number of reasons: poor leadership; poor research; the time, place and circumstance; and poor financial support, so I do understand why more money could not be allocated to us. Why would UUA leaders believe our project would be any different? Why would they believe we could pull off what had not been done really well since the work of the late Rev. David Eaton at All Souls Church, Unitarians? He grew a strong multicultural ministry during his two decades as the minister, but the church fell apart after his death and did not recover until the recent ministry of Rev. Robert Hardies.

. . .⁹

Taquiena Boston, Director of Identity-Based Ministries with the UUA contends that the approach to creating multicultural/multicultural faith communities (her language) depends on the definition of multiracial/multicultural. For example she says:

“Christian denominations that are more racially and culturally diverse than the UUA often have a tradition of culturally-specific congregations that correspond to the history of race relations, immigration, and identity-based neighborhood organizations in the US. They can call themselves diverse because their denominational membership includes congregations that are predominantly African American, Korean, Hispanic, Italian, Irish, etc. in a single congregation’s membership demographic. Multiracial/multicultural congregations that include a mixture of racial/cultural groups are the minority in Christian denominations, and half of these congregations according to research – are actually experiencing a demographic shift to another monoculture because of changes in neighborhood demographics. In addition, the traditional wisdom around congregation growth emphasizes homogeneity as a critical success factor. Research also points out that persons most attracted to multiracial/multicultural congregations are members of interracial couples or multiracial families who are seeking a worship community that reflects the racial/cultural diversity of family members and /or families like themselves. I think that however an institution defines multiracial/multicultural, there is a role for both culturally-specific congregations and for intentionally

⁹ John Thomas Crestwell, Jr, *The Charge of the Chalice: The Davies Memorial Unitarian Universalist Church Growth and Diversity Story* (Camp Springs, MD: Movement Ministries, 2007), 35.

multiracial/multicultural congregations. Whatever approach the institution takes, diversity of ministries (staffing, lay leadership, programming) is essential to diversity of membership. The second approach will be the most challenging because it is counter-cultural, and the history of congregations has been a tradition of racial and cultural segregation. In addition, the racial injustice and “micro-aggressions” that people of color experience in every other aspect of their lives makes them reluctant to engage such struggles in religious community. Finally, class – and its intersection with race/culture – presents another obstacle to creating racially and culturally diverse congregations, especially in liberal faith communities. Liberal communities tend to be populated by people with more formal education, and people who identify with ruling class values about education, “professionalism,” and social sophistication. Liberal values tend towards individualism. I hear liberal circles make distinctions between spirituality and justice more than persons from marginalized communities.¹⁰

Certain denominations and associations including historical mainline, evangelical non-Pentecostal, Pentecostal, and charismatic and fundamentalist groups contend that the “most effective” congregations are those whose members belong to the same ethnic group.¹¹

Culturally Specific and Culturally Diverse Congregation Models

Reverend Jacqueline Lewis, Senior Minister of Vision, Worship and the Arts at Middle Collegiate Church in New York City, cites revealing statistics that support the aforementioned statement. She asserts that “of 300,000 Christian congregations in this country, only six percent are multiracial, that is, comprised 20% of another race other than the majority.¹² We have much work to do around this issue (diversity). . . and capacities to be built. We don’t need communities of people pretending to be all the same, but rather communities in which the unique particularity of each person is

¹⁰ Personal Correspondence, March 20, 2007. Boston, MA.

¹¹ C. Michael Hawn, *One Bread, One Body: Exploring Cultural Diversity in Worship* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 2003), 36.

¹² Conference Brochure, *Now is the Time: Leading Congregations into a Multiracial, Multicultural Future*. February, 2007.

recognized, accepted and affirmed. In the midst of that, it is important to risk showing our authentic selves and embracing the conflict that we might encounter, even while we commit to stay in relationship.”¹³ Taquina Boston defines a multicultural congregation as one where no one racial group comprises more than 80-90% of the membership. In a focus group that inquired about what UU congregations would need to do to be considered multicultural. The participants indicated the following: 1) commit to becoming intentionally welcoming, inclusive, and affirming of diverse races, cultures and other identities; 2) support member congregations and UUA initiatives to develop multiracial/multicultural ministries and congregations and 3 engage in multiracial/multicultural partnerships to support institutions that empower communities of color and their leadership. Middle Collegiate Church is a multicultural congregation that was able to successfully transition from a culturally specific congregation, European American, to multicultural congregation. They are a teaching congregation that celebrates the arts, is comprised of ministries that nurture “mind, body and spirit’ through worship, care and education. They have a social action component and engage in interfaith dialogue for the purpose of justice and reconciliation. Some of the outreach strategies they engaged to achieve multiculturalism were:

- 1) intentional outreach to African Americans (advertised in the Amsterdam News);
- 2) programming that African Americans identified, including culture ie jazz on the church steps and gospel choir; 3) outreach through the arts ie. after school arts program for children of single, low income parents; 4) hired multiracial/multicultural leadership

¹³ Conference Brochure. Now is the Time: Leading Congregations into a multiracial, Multicultural Future. February, 2007.

and 5) planned for and supported shift to leadership of senior minister of color. Their vision for 2010 is as follows:

1) focus groups to identify vision for the future; 2) action, care, participatory worship; 3) staffing to implement the vision; 4) programs to attract and serve racially and culturally diverse membership; 5) internal leadership development, including antiracism/multiculturalism and 6) assessment and evaluation.

Lewis identified some of the challenges involved in becoming multicultural/multiracial:

They include 1) language, that is, how do people want to be called; 2) representation of group identity, that is, how do we form a group identity that reflects everyone?; and 3) how to cope with projections and biases when they surface. For that matter, how to handle conflict because it is inevitable. Some of the strategies Lewis listed included:

1) raise level of racial/cultural identity and awareness; 2) remind congregants of who “we” are 3) provide education and classes; 4) clergy must model for congregants how to negotiate and 5) racial and cultural boundaries.

Multicultural Approach to Education

Scholars such as Barbara Wilkerson believe that all congregations should train their leaders and modify their Religious Education (RE) programs to accommodate a multicultural world¹⁴. Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson...believe that . . . religious teachings concern what it means to be human.¹⁵ Pursuing goals of multicultural education according to Sonia Nieto accomplishes the following: 1) more productive

¹⁴ Barbara Wilkerson, ed. *Multicultural Religious Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1997) 12.

¹⁵ Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson, eds. *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* (Louisville: Westminster John Press, 1996) 10-12.

learning environments, 2) more varied instructional strategies 3) a greater awareness of the role culture and language play in the learning process and 4) potential to create mutual and equitable relations among all groups in society.¹⁶

Origins and Goals of Multicultural Education

In the early 20th century educators were compelled to pay greater attention to diversity because of the large influx of second generation immigrant students whose parents had migrated to the United States in the previous century.¹⁷ The presence of the immigrant off springs interfacing with already existing ethnic groups already experiencing segregated and inferior education caused educators to re-examine the goal of the melting pot paradigm which was the prevailing educational philosophy at that time. It was popularized by Israel Zangwill. Educational historian, Ellwood Patterson Cubberley in 1909 described the melting pot model as follows: “Our task is to break up these groups or settlements (of immigrants), to assimilate and amalgamate these people as part of our American race, and to implant in their children, as far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government, and to awaken in them a reverence for our democratic institutions and for those things in our national life which we as a people hold to be of abiding worth.”¹⁸ (13) According to Wilkerson, Cubberley’s analysis failed to consider the plight of African-American and Native American children who were unable to assimilate or amalgamate because of some of their highly visible indicators such as skin color, distinct facial features, and hair texture . Furthermore, the assumption of white superiority further marginalized these

¹⁶ Barbara Wilkerson., ed. *Multicultural Religious Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1997) 19.

¹⁷ Barbara Wilkerson, ed. *Multicultural Religious Education*, 13.

¹⁸ Barbara Wilkerson, ed. *Multicultural Religious Education*, 13.

children and essentially rendered them invisible. Faith communities were often party to such assumptions as exemplified by Robert Baird, church historian. Baird ranked all other ethnic groups in America “downward” establishing Anglo-Saxons as the normative experience.¹⁹ In 1911, a forty-one page report commissioned by Congress documented the “inferiority” of immigrants. Lawrence Cremin contends that the report resulted in the drastic reduction of future immigration into the United States.²⁰ So while advocates and leaders voiced the need for a transformation in the educational philosophy employed by school systems it wasn’t until the second decade of the twentieth century that Horace Kallen conceived a new model, termed, cultural pluralism. Initially, few showed interest in it. During wartimes the Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924 all but halted immigration to the United States for any groups except those from Northern and Western Europe. Intergroup or intercultural education emerged as a result of racial wars in America (name some) This movement was aimed at reducing racial prejudice and misunderstanding which previously had led to violence in the United States. Some RE in faith communities as well as public educators advanced the goals of intercultural education in the 1950s. James Banks contends that this was the first stream of education that spawned diversity.(14) However, several deficiencies resulted in the demise of the cultural pluralism movement: 1) it was never institutionalized 2) it was mainly perceived for schools in conflict 3) it never developed a coherent articulation of its philosophy in relationship to American education and political values (14-15)

Meanwhile, assimilation proved to be an effective strategy for the Irish, Italians and Polish. While they initially experienced discrimination upon arriving in the United

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

States, by the 2nd or 3rd generation they were able to readily assimilate. However, some paid a dear price – having to give up their cultural identity, while others managed to integrate their old country traditions with their newly adopted country. However, ethnic groups like African-Americans and Native Americans did not possess the ability to blend, camouflage and assimilate because of their obvious physical distinctions. The second factor to influence multicultural education was the 1960s civil rights movement. The successes achieved through confronting the racial barriers in America dismantled some of the most blatant forms of discrimination in education, housing, transportation, education employment and social norms. The third steam to influence multicultural education ironically was immigration laws, specifically the Immigration Reform Act of 1965 and 1968. Shifting trends immigration and events revealed the following dynamics:

- The number of immigrants entering the US increased almost 80% as compared between 1951-60
- Europeans had previously accounted for almost 60 percent of immigrants during the 1950s in contrast to the years between 1971 and 1980 that they represented only 18%
- The number of Asians and Latin Americans dramatically increased during this period
- Between 1981 and 1989, 85 percent of immigrants came from Asia (47%) and Latin America (38%)
- United States experienced a declining birthrate
- Funding provided by 1968 Bilingual Education initiated bilingual programs in school districts with large immigrant populations
- Churches and community agencies became involved in sponsoring families of refugees and worked to help them get settled.

Several approaches to multicultural education evolved beginning in the 1970s.

Anthropologist, Mary Gibson described multicultural education as a, “process whereby a person develops competencies in multiple systems of standards for perceiving, evaluating, behaving and doing.” The five core ideas she identified are:

- culture and ethnic group are not equated; instead, diversity within an ethnic group is recognized.

- Education includes out-of-school learning.
- Ethnic isolation is antithetical to education, since the development of competencies in a new culture requires intensive interaction with people who are already competent.
- Individuals need not reject their cultural identity to function in a different cultural milieu.
- Divisive dichotomies between cultures are avoided, bringing about an increased awareness of multiculturalism as “the normal human experience.”

Some of the most prevalent models that evolved during the beginning and subsequent years of the 1970s are described here:

Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant – In 1987 Sleeter and Grant reviewed the professional literature on multicultural education and identified five distinct approaches discerned in the literature:

1) teaching the culturally different – an assimilationist approach aimed at helping minority students develop competence in the public culture of the dominant group. It is aimed at helping educators teach “culturally different” students;

2) human relations approach – seeks to promote communication and good human relations among students of different backgrounds. Helping students feel good about themselves is one of its primary goals. While this model is a rich source of practical ideas for teachers it tends to be short on “well grounded theory and long term-goals”

Furthermore, Sleeter and Grant contend that it fails to address issues of social stratification such as poverty, institutional racism, and powerlessness.

3) single-group studies – focuses on the cultural experiences of a single ethnic group.

While special attention is given to curriculum and instruction and stresses contributions and experiences of the ethnic group, Sleeter and Grant are critical of its avoidance of

oppression and social stratification. As a result teachers and learners are not sensitized to the need for social change.

4) multi cultural education – is the most widely represented in the professional literature.

The five major goals of this approach are: 1) promotion of the strength and value of cultural diversity 2) respect for human rights and cultural diversity, 3) alternative life choices, 4) social justice and equal opportunity for all and 5) equitable distribution of power among all ethnic groups.²¹ This approach focuses mainly on race and ethnicity, the cultures of American racial groups, and in some instances, culture as an anthropological concept. This approach appears to have the strongest theoretical base. However, Sleeter and Grant contend that this model has not dealt seriously with pedagogy or with system wide educational practices that need changing. In the opinion of the two researchers this model has not been widely applied, and thus has failed to show examples of the model in operation.

5) multicultural education and social reconstructionist – This is the approach that Sleeter and Grant espouse. It refers to, “education that prepares young people to take social action against social structural inequality.”²²

The goals of this approach are transformational or emancipatory and include changing teaching practices that classrooms become more democratic and students learn to use power for collective betterment rather than mainly learning obedience.²³ The strength of this approach is its aim of “reducing racism and building a more just society.” One of its weaknesses is a lack of informational material on ways to achieve its goals for education. At the time this research few empirical studies existed on multicultural

²¹ Barbara Wilkerson, ed. Multicultural Religious Education, 18

²² Ibid..

²³ Ibid.

education. Leonard and Patricia Davidman propose a “synthesis conception” that integrates elements that are multifaceted, change-oriented strategy aimed at six interrelated goals: 1) educational equity; 2) intercultural, 3) interethnic and intergroup harmony in the learning environment, 4) expanded knowledge of cultural and ethnic groups; and 5) the development of learners, parents and educators guided by a multicultural perspective.²⁴

Historical Overview of Unitarian Universalist Religious Education and its Social, Psychological and Theological Foundations

Eleanor Morton, Director of Religious Education in Minneapolis, Minnesota asserts that Sunday School has not always been a mainstay of American life.²⁵ According to Eugene Navias, the first documented Sunday School was started by Theophilus Lindsey in 1763 in Yorkshire, England.²⁶ ²⁷ Gloucester printer, Robert Raikes published Reading, Riting and Religion which spread quickly through England and then America according to Navias.²⁸ He contends that in the New World, the Sunday School movement emerged in the late 18th century shortly after the formal creation of American Universalism by John Murray and just prior to the emergence of American Unitarianism. A 1790 resolution adopted by early Universalists depicts some social and theological aspects of religious education in its infancy:

²⁴ Barbara Wilkerson, ed. Multicultural Religious Education, 19.

²⁵ Eleanor Morton, Ever Onward and Upward: A History of Religious Education in the Prairie Star District (http://www.psduua.org/heritage/bring/part1/1d_morton.html).

²⁶ Eugene Navias, A Short History of Unitarian Universalist Religious Education. Unpublished paper, April, 2003.

²⁷ Lindsey and British scientist and minister, Joseph Priestley are considered the founders of British Unitarianism. Thus Lindsey made two substantial contributions, Unitarianism and the Sunday School movement. Unfortunately, Lindsey has been given little acknowledgement for his contribution.

²⁸ Eugene Navias, A Short History of Unitarian Universalist Religious Education. Unpublished paper, April, 2003. 1.

The Instruction of Children – We believe it to be the duty of all parents to instruct their children in the principles of the gospel, as the best means to inspire them with the love of virtue, and to promote in good manners, and habits of industry and sobriety. As a necessary, introduction to the knowledge of the gospel, we recommend the institution of a school, or schools to be under the direction of every church; in which shall be taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and psalmody. We recommend, further, that provision be made for instructing poor children, in the said schools, gratis. As the fullest discovery of the perfections and will of God, and of the whole duty of man, is maintained in the Bible we wish that divine book to be read by the youth of our churches as early and frequently as possible; and that they should be instructed therein at stated meetings appointed for that purpose.²⁹

Navias' findings note that early universal public education reached out to "community children who would otherwise be deprived of basic schooling." Likewise, Morton contends that Raikes' initial intention was to provide religious education. Instead, the teachers soon realized the need to provide reading and writing. Thus, it could be said that religious education was "the forerunners of public-supported education."³⁰ Navias maintains that catechisms for older children and youth began to appear in 1782 when Judith Sargent Stevens (later Murray) wrote and published an elaborate catechism in Gloucester, MA.³¹ Shippie Townsend, also contributed a catechism for children in 1787 in those early days to Universalist curricula. In 1810, Navias' research notes that Hosea Ballou wrote a child's Scriptural Catechism. Navias notes another catechism in 1865 in Rhode Island that reflected the influence of Restorationist Controversy that stated no matter how sinful, all souls would be restored to God's favor.

²⁹ Eugene Navias. A Short History of Unitarian Universalist Religious Education. Unpublished paper, April, 2003. excerpted from Richard Eddy Universalism in America, Vol. 1 Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1891).

³⁰ Eleanor Morton, Ever Onward and Upward: A History of Religious Education in the Prairie Star District (http://www.psd.uaa.org/heritage/bring/part1/1d_morton.html).

³¹ Eleanor Morton, Ever Onward and Upward: A History of Religious Education in the Prairie Star District (http://www.psd.uaa.org/heritage/bring/part1/1d_morton.html). Eugene Navias, A Short History of Unitarian Universalist Religious Education. Unpublished paper, April, 2003. 2.

Reverend William Ellery Channing, a Unitarian minister, represented one of the early influences on UU religious education. In 1837 he urged the audience of the Boston Sunday School Society to have faith in children and instead of stamping their adult thoughts and ideas, to stir up those of the children. He further emphasized the importance of helping children to see and feel the love of God rather than merely telling them of God's love.³² However, Channing disapproved of catechisms according to Navias and denounced them at an 1837 annual meeting he attended. Channing described them as "a skeleton, a dead letter, putrification and lifeless form."³³ While the curricula being used by Unitarians and others at that time were "didactic and authority-centered" Channing, though he objected to catechisms had otherwise a very progressive vision of education that included the transmission of the author's or teacher's beliefs to the learner.

While the Unitarian Sunday School Society was not an official arm of the American Unitarian Universalist Association, they accomplished the following: publication of curriculum, guides for Sunday School Superintendents, Sunday School hymnals and worship books and conferences to train Sunday School leaders and teachers," according to Navias. Universalist schools continued to address the educational needs of Universalists when in 1851 they formed the Universalist Teachers Union that assumed the name of the Universalist Sabbath School Union in 1856. A few years later in 1913, Navias' findings notes that the Universalist General Sunday School Society in Utica, New York united the disparate efforts of the Universalist State Conventions for Universalist Sunday Schools.³⁴ Meanwhile, the Unitarian Sunday School Society

³² Eleanor Morton, *Ever Onward and Upward: A History of Religious Education in the Prairie Star District* (http://www.psd.ua.edu/heritage/bring/part1/1d_morton.html).

³³ Eugene Navias, *A Short History of UU RE*, 2003. 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

published five curricula series from 1833 to 1909 before the actual creation of the American Unitarian Association formed its own Department of Religious Education in 1912.

Morton contends that for the rest of the century most Unitarians simply followed the Sunday School practices of mainline Protestant Churches, rooted in the Judeo-Christian Bible while reflecting a “liberal and modernist point of view.”³⁵ Navias’ findings appear to also substantiate a similar claim for Universalists who he contends published “uniform lessons” along with most evangelical Protestant denominations.³⁶ However, things shifted when it was decided that Universalist children needed to learn more about their faith tradition and its uniquenesses. In response, an array of periodicals and pamphlets were produced for week or monthly home use by parents with their children and to assist those adults who taught in the church schools to augment their lessons.³⁷

Two individuals at odds with each others beliefs about religious education for children in the 1870s and contemporaries of Raikes were Jonathan Edwards and Charles Chauncy. Edwards maintained that a child could come to God and goodness only through a conversion experience.³⁸ Furthermore, he believed that children should be taught the Calvinist catechism and instructed from the pulpit. Chauncy on the other hand contended that individuals comes to a gradual awareness and understanding of religious truths through teachings. Jonathon Mayhew was also an 18th century liberal that asserted that

³⁵ Edith Fisher Hunter, Sophia Lyon Fahs: Liberal Religious Educator
<http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/unitarians/fahs.html>

³⁶ Eugene Navias, A Short History of UU RE. 2003, 3.

³⁷ Eugene Navias, A Short History of UU RE, 2003, 3.

³⁸ Eleanor Morton, Ever Onward and Upward: A History of Religious Education in the Prairie Star District. p. 2.

humans possessed the ability to discern right from wrong, think for themselves and honor the religious conscience of others. Ten years after Robert Raikes established the first Sunday School in 1780, Dr. Benjamin Rush founded the Sunday School Society in Philadelphia. By 1827, according to Morton, there were more than two dozen Sunday Schools in Unitarian churches in New England alone. Some of the initial resistance to Sunday Schools was based on the erroneous belief that attendance at services would drop and that the mixing of girls and boys would result in immoral behavior if they this new approach to religious education was instituted. By 1827 the Boston Sunday School Society was created.³⁹ In the interim, Henry Ware, Jr edited and published in 1833 what Morton contends is the first very first Unitarian curriculum. In 1872, Reverend Jenkin Lloyd Jones began a publication titled, *The Sunday School* in which he wrote articles on theory, methods and lessons. In addition Jones amazing energy included weekly teachers' meetings, a published songbook, and a book for special occasions. By 1878 Jones had began publishing Sunday School courses in his new periodical, *Unity*. Other developments added momentum to the evolution of Sunday Schools when in 1875, Reverend George F. Piper became Secretary of the Sunday School Society and created approximately 300 lessons. Unfortunately, these lessons were considered too liberal for the conservatives and too conservative for the liberals. In addition, the materials were too advanced for their designated age group. According to Edith Fisher Hunter, Reverend Allen Walton Gould, one of the prophetic voices of the 19th century was raised with the

³⁹ Ibid.

publishing in the of Beginnings, an early sociology of religion in the last quarter of the 19th century.⁴⁰

The Kindergarten movement began as early as 1834 by Elizabeth Peabody, a Unitarian in Boston, Massachusetts in the Bronson Alcott School. The movement began to gain popularity in the late nineteenth century according to Navias' findings.

In the 1890s, Dr. Edward A. Horton published a fourth Unitarian curriculum in Boston according to Morton. This curriculum followed a one-topic three-level format with seven topics in the series. The entire church school used the same topic on all levels including the primary, junior and senior levels. Horton utilized didactic teaching and rote learning to instill religious tradition and moral character. While the curriculum clearly addressed the varying development levels of its learners, it still failed to integrate liberal religious psychology, social and theological foundations. Thus it essentially utilized the prevailing Bible and Christian history. A fifth curriculum of Horton's called, *The Beacon Series*, though short lived, used myths from "many cultures, ethics, social awareness, and evolution." This curriculum, perhaps in an effort to interject Unitarian values applied critical scholarship to the Bible. However, Morton believes because it was content focused and failed to draw on the experiences of the children, it was not popular and was soon discontinued.

The Universalists continued publishing uniform lessons well into the 1900's in an effort to sustain their participation in interdenominational initiatives as well as to gain access to training and certification for their teachers.⁴¹ However, fears of the loss of their identity prompted the creation of curriculum that reflected new theories in education,

⁴⁰ Edith Fisher Hunter, Sophia Lyon Fahs: Liberal Religious Educator in Notable American Unitarians (<http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/Unitarians/fahs.html>) p 4.

⁴¹ Eugene Navias, A Short History of UU RE, 2003, 4.

Biblical study and religious education. In 1903 the Religious Education Association was founded which brought together liberation educators and professional leaders including Unitarians and Universalists as some of the earliest members Navias notes in his research findings.

It was over one hundred years later that Universalists and Unitarians separately produced RE materials specifically designed for their use. This resource, *New Beacon Series in Religious Education*, was begun in 1937.

If the Unitarians were struggling to meet the challenges of RE, then the Universalists were struggling mightily to create relevant RE resources for its members. Morton describes their efforts:

In 1888, the Universalists agreed that they would use the uniform lessons of the orthodox churches, but with the addition of Biblical interpretations that would illuminate Universalist principles. Finally, in 1901, the Universalist Graded Lessons were published, similar to the Protestant curricula but more liberal. By 1920, however, they were out of print and never reissued. Things picked up with the establishment of the General Sunday School Association in 1913. Funding was made available for staffing and publications. Clinton Lee Scott in *The Universalist Church, A Short Story* wrote: "It operated in a period of tentative pedagogical theories and experimentation. It magnified the place of the child in the church, pressed for better housing of children's classes, and enlarged the scope of religious nurture in the home and community. The Association was able to make the transition from Bible-centered to curriculum-centered to experience-centered teaching, with a facility less readily achieved in the larger denominational bodies."⁴²

Significant occurrences influenced liberal religious education between 1890 and 1910 that are worth noting here. Interest in world religions flourished among Unitarians and Universalists leaders who enthusiastically took part in the World Congress of

⁴² Eleanor Morton, *Ever Onward and Upward: A History of Religious Education in the Prairie Star District* (http://www.psduua.org/heritage/bring/part1/1d_morton.html). 5-6.

Religion in Chicago in 1893.⁴³ Additionally, in 1896 John Dewey published his book, *School and Society* that launched the era of progressive educational philosophy.⁴⁴

The social and theological foundations of UU RE were more apparent with *The New Beacon Course I R*⁴⁵ *eligious Education* published in 1912 in the Sixth Unitarian Curriculum. Not only did it reflect John Dewey's philosophy of education that essentially proposed educating children through a curriculum rich in real-life problem-solving experiences, but the content is also broadened to include "more non-biblical materials, the study of other denominations, science, great lives, and social concerns as they affected young people."⁴⁶ The content was child-centered using content centered discussion questions complemented with activities such as coloring, pasting, and writing exercises. According to Morton, this curriculum was "far in advance of anything being done by other denominations." Just as Morton noted in 1912 for its progressiveness, Navias highlights 1912 because the American Unitarian Association instituted a Department of Education that assumed responsibility for publishing curricula from the Unitarian Sunday School Society. Navias and Morton both note the shift from "material-centered" curriculum to "child-centered" curriculum. Navias astutely notes the development of "moral character and world problems" in Junior and Senior high curricula such as *Talks to Young People on Ethics and Our Part in the World*.

In the late 1920s two curriculum committees met to plan for "future curriculum development," according to Morton. In the 1930s feedback on Unitarian religious

⁴³ Eugene Navias, *A Short History of UU RE*, 2003, 3-4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Eleanor Morton, *Ever Onward and Upward: A History of religious Education in the Prairie Star District*, p. 6-7.

education suggested deficiencies. In 1936 a Unitarian Unified Curriculum Committee drafted the following objectives after the 1933 Commission of Appraisal, chaired by Frederick May Elliot, called for “major new resources” for RE and reaffirmed the centrality of RE to the Unitarian movement.⁴⁷ Another curriculum body, despite their distinctly different views on educational, theological and psychological dimensions drafted a statement by 1931 which Morton contends made absolutely no references to the “Bible, Jesus or Christianity.”⁴⁸ While the 1930s was a tumultuous time due to the depression that had devastated the country, Unitarians continued to gain momentum in the development of RE curriculum. While feeling the effects of the depression Unitarians while lacking funds to invest in new materials nevertheless conducted exploratory work through study committees in Boston and New York.⁴⁹ In 1935 Reverend Ernest Keubler was appointed Secretary of the Department of RE. Keubler was a “liberal theist, influenced in his thinking by Bushness, Coe, and Hartshorne, and in educational philosophy, a follower of Dewey and Kilpatrick.”⁵⁰ Amidst all the valiant efforts to upgrade RE curriculum a momentary setback occurred when the findings of the 1936 report of the Commission on Appraisal showed that interest in RE was low. This was not good news for a religious denomination that had focused so much of its fiscal and human resources on RE. Perhaps one can speculate that the hiring of Sophia Lyon Fahs in 1937 in which Kubler was instrumental, reflected attempts to rectify this deficiency in RE.

⁴⁷ Eugene Navias, *A Short History of UU RE*, 2003, 4.

⁴⁸ Eleanor Morton, *Ever Onward and Upward: A History of Religious Education in the Prairie Star District* (http://www.psdoua.org/heritage/bring/part1/1d_morton.html), 7.

⁴⁹ Edith Fisher Hunter, *Sophia Lyon Fahs: Liberal Religious Educator* in *Notable American Unitarians* (<http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/Unitarians/fahs.html>), 4.

⁵⁰ Eleanor Morton, *Ever Onward and Upward: A History of Religious Education in the Prairie Star District* (http://www.psdoua.org/heritage/bring/part1/1d_morton.html), 7.

Fahs almost immediately began to produce new curriculum under the New Beacon Series that she either authored, co-authored and edited.⁵¹

A number of histories acknowledge declining enrollments in our church schools during the thirties, due in large part to the Depression and the falling birth rates. By the late 40s, however, it as “full steam ahead” through the 50s and 60s, the years of surprising growth for Unitarians and Universalists. The Fellowship movement had started in 1948; the post-war birth rate was at a record high, the economy was prospering, and church schools were once again expanding. . .⁵²

In 1936, a Unitarian Unified Curriculum Committee drafted the following objectives for RE: 1) an intelligent religious faith; 2) religious and ethical idealism. . . and character; 3) highest religious and ethical values. . .and the desire to conserve them; 4) ability and desire to participate in the development of the church; and 5) ability and disposition to contribute to an improved social order.

In 1937 Sophia Lyons Fahs was appointed Curriculum Editor. Fahs had been a student of John Dewey at Columbia University and George Albert Coe and Hugh Hartshorne. In addition she had five children that she drew insights from that informed her educational philosophy. She believed that each child is born holy and that religion grows from the daily experiences of life as children explore the natural world and the human world of family and peers.⁵³ This “New Era” that she and others were ushering in is captured in some of the following: 1) RE should be grounded in the first hand experience of children; 2) a world view that holds that the universe is one and humanity its natural child; 3) religion grows from natural human experience; 4) historical and biblical study comes when children are old enough to discover the “universality of human

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Eleanor Morton, *Ever Onward and Upward: A History of Religious Education in the Prairie Star District* (http://www.psd.uaa.org/heritage/bring/part1/1d_morton.html), 8.

⁵³ Eugene Navias, *A Short History of UU RE*, 2003, 5

wonderings, questions, and fears that binds them together with those who came before them; 5) RE begins at home.

Dr. Dorothy Tilden Spoerl assumed the Curriculum Editor's position upon Fahs' retirement. In an effort to determine the pulse of the members Spoerl conducted a survey that determine that few UU children found their congregation of central importance to in their lives. Curricula were developed that drew on the feedback obtained.

With the Depression, World War II and the Halocaust in its not too distant memory, the 1960s symbolized change as a result of the peacetime economy. Now the civil rights movement consumed national attention during a time when a popular anthem was "question authority." According to Navias, a new secularism was the prevailing trend beginning to influence RE. The Commission on Education and Liberal Religion suggested that more emphasis be placed on ethics, UU ideals, theology, freedom and responsibility, the natural order and social relationships, states Navias' findings.⁵⁴ Hugo Holleroth, a member of the Commission, articulated core values and attitudes of UUs as follows: 1) freedom; 2) responsibility; 3) sensitivity; 4) self-discipline; 5) honesty; 6) self-identity; 6) adventuresomeness; 7) love and 8) independence.⁵⁵

In the 1970s another shift occurred, UUs wanted curricula that were explicitly religious and that shred the heritage of UUism. This in essence grew out of a concern about the high attrition rate of UU young adults after they finished senior high school and went off to college. Furthermore, the changing social norms, research in human development, faith development theory, increased interest in adult RE, new prophetic imperatives for justice, suggested new philosophy, methods and materials of UU RE.

⁵⁴ Eugene Navias, *A Short History of UU RE*, 2003, 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Navias reports that in 1979 the UUA Board of Trustees appointed a blue ribbon task force, the Religious Education Futures Committee, to make a two year continent-wide study and to recommend the process, guidelines, resources and funded needed for RE. Excerpts are selected as follows: 1) We must build upon the pluralistic nature of our movement and provide programs which not only address the diversity among us but which nourish commitment to the UU Principles we hold in common; 2) We must recognize the church as a worshipping and educating community for all ages, and therefore address religious growth from infancy through adulthood; 3) We must develop and publish curricula and program materials through the Section of RE, as well as assist local societies (congregations) in designing and evaluating curricula which meet their specific needs; 4) We must design curricula in spiral rather than in linear terms⁵⁶.

According to Kathleen Carpenter, Director of Religious Education at Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Charlotte, a 700 member congregation, “Instead of educating individuals about RE, we need to give them tools to deepen their spirituality and emphasis on UU identity.”⁵⁷ Carpenter contends that in the 1960s and 1970s UU curricula were very secular with a focus on world religions and UU identity. However, the mid 1980s and early 1990s presented a shift so that new curriculum reflects a focus on faith development. Approximately sixty percent of UU curricula used are UU developed.

In more recent years Judith Frediani, Director of Lifespan Faith Development of the UUA, has articulated the following role of the newly named Department formerly known as Religious Education, “Our job in Lifespan Faith Development is to help people

⁵⁶ Eugene Navias, *A Short History of UU RE*, 2003, 10.

⁵⁷ Kathleen Carpenter, interview, Charlotte, NC 2005.

make life religious – help make our lives meaningful, ethical, spiritual, connected, mindful.”⁵⁸ Currently, the movement in the UUA is away from RE to faith development philosophy.

For the purposes of this research the most recent research was from the 1982 to 2002 period that identified the most recent and available RE recommendations. They include the following: 1) growing recognition among UUA leaders, ministerial and lay, and congregations that quality programs of lifespan (child, youth and adult) RE are essential for growing congregations and a healthy UU movement; 2) greatly increased membership in and collegial supports by the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA); 3) higher standards in RE in the requirements for UU ministry by the UUA Ministerial Fellowship Committee 4) recognition that congregations and their professional and lay leaders and skilled consultation and access to training and resources now being made available in many districts through the employment of District Program Consultants by the UUA in collaboration with the Districts; 5) Establishment of an office and a full time Director of RE Credentialing in 2003; 6) Increased collegial collaboration between the UU Ministers Association and LREDA which has resulted in a joint UUMA/LREDA Professionals Day at General Assemblies and other cooperative ventures; 7) The endowment of the Angus H. MacLean Chair in RE at the Meadville/Lombard Theological School and the appointment of Dr. Susan Harlow; and the goal of the Starr Kind Theological to fund a chair in honor of RE Til Evans; and 8) the establishment of the Sophia Lyons Fahs Center for RE at Meadville/Lombard (which is in quiescence due to a lack of funding).

⁵⁸ Judith A. Frediani, Lifespan Faith Development-Board of Trustees Report (Boston: UUA, April 2007), 1.

RE as a Corrective Tool to Oppression

Transformation of society is a worthy goal for a faith community that takes it beyond mere lip service and moves it towards actual implementation and participation. For at the root of any ethnic groups spirituality and its interpretation of social context is its calling to be present in the world in a meaningful way that reflects a legacy and contribution. Therefore it stands to reason that one of the tasks of religious education is to help learners embrace a spirituality of transformation. Effective religious education must capture bonding, mutuality and resistance toward such behaviors and attitudes as individualism. Individualism leads to alienation and depersonalization. Sacredness of individuals, reflection and critique of contemporary society's narcissistic focus on the self provides some balance by actively being in service on behalf of others. The demise of community and tendencies towards alienation and ennui that reflects disengagement is never a good sign. During slavery, segregation and discrimination were visible forms of racism that provided sharp distinctions between right relations with others and violations of said relationships. The complexity of current problems often exceeds any superficial analysis and thus the ability of religious educators to know what to do about many of these problems. To guard against a sense of feeling overwhelmed it is important to constantly engage in rigorous interrogation of curricula. Many UUs have experienced some loss of memory with respect to its historic function. A similar parallel can be seen among some middle class Blacks and their relationship to the Black underclass. The middle class ethos of consumerism, careerism and materialism pose a threat to the middle class in general in this country. And UU's are not immune to this reality. While there is little evidence of conspicuous consumption among UU, never the less UUs take pride in

their high levels of education and culture. At the same time many take for granted their white skin privilege and their cultured lifestyle. This is true to the extent that little progress has been made to sign onto some of the social justice efforts to correct some of the economic injustices and gaps within our congregations. Furthermore, UUs have failed to really invest in any kind of serious and ongoing class analyses. As a result, UUs risk the threat of individualism and self-centeredness amidst their growing prosperity and affluence. How do UUs redefine its religious education mission in light of: 1) the need for identity formation 2) alienation and the need for the restoration of holistic relationships and 3) religious fundamentalism and the need for spiritual and social empowerment in the present social context? One of the challenges of UU Religious education is achieving a balance between revitalizing its rich heritage and responding to the needs of a its growing diverse community of bi-racial children and its desire to become more racially and culturally diverse.

Findings

The purpose of RE is to sponsor persons toward a mature faith. It is the role of RE to sponsor persons towards freedom The role of religious education in reproducing the diverse ideologies, values, perspectives and lived experiences of its faith community cannot be ignored, particularly as it relates to its own religious culture and the larger social norms. Morton contends that Universalists and Unitarians have always tended toward the more liberal movements in educational philosophy and psychology.⁵⁹ This was clearly evident in the overview of RE Unitarian Universalis primarily drawn from

⁵⁹ Eleanor Morton, *Ever Onward and Upward: A History of Religious Education in the Prairie Star District* (http://www.psd.uaa.org/heritage/bring/part1/1d_morton.html)

Eugene Navias' comprehensive research findings. Additionally, the role of religious education in giving voice to and exercising power carries tremendous responsibility. Faith communities seeking to embrace diversity as an integral dimension of its religious beliefs and putting its faith in action must be prepared to constantly interrogate its definition and use of power. While it has been noted that not all cultural groups share the same "truths" and certainly many reflect different learning styles, however, the cultural views of "reality" and what is real for one demands cultural competence to be able to bring into the open those differences. Herein lies the political nature of religious education professional, that is, the teacher(s) and minister(s). Deciding which cultural traditions will be privileged is not the issue so much as how power is shared.

What appeared to emerge in the literature is the ability of the religious education professional to nurture an appreciation in him or herself for multicultural curriculum that does not stop with the basics of similarities and differences but also develops an eye and ear, that is, a feel for what is needed to be affirming of the differences and where do we need to be affirmed more?

Lewis encouraged participants to create spaces in their lives where they can do the work of creating multicultural congregations. She invited participants to export the conversation beyond the table to home and work places. Finally, she invites people to take the conversation to the community. Again, reminding us that we are a border people, that is, we live with multiple identities. As Reverend Carlos Rodriguez says, we live in the hyphen. Just Lewis asserts that our job every Sunday is to translate. Being on the border makes it imperative that we be conversant, because race in America affects everyone.

How Can UUs Become More Diverse?

Lewis, Boston and other small groups suggested that UUs must find ways to diversify their ministries: commitment; vision; staffing; programming (worship, RE, social action, outreach). In attending a weekend retreat on Leading Congregations into a Multiracial, Multicultural Future, led by Reverend Jacqueline Lewis, the following approaches were gleaned:

- The congregation has to claim diversity today – right now and project it into the not yet future – claim what they can do now for the future; Congregations are writing and living the future right now. They have to speak the good news in many different ways;
- They have to serve as a container and create a community for who they are becoming and for those who they would seek to attract. They also have to be able to say, “these are my people.”
- Formational stories – The power of stories and the word. Most stories have a beginning, middle and end; talking and sharing stories builds intimacy. They may have to do some exegesis on themselves so that they are “storying the future.” Re-storying race means preaching, teaching, education, conversation, confrontation. It also means that many of us need to put ourselves in therapeutic relationships and have our stories re-framed. It means acknowledging the narratives that have formed us (slavery in America, like Lisa in the kindergarten circle, like the lynching of Emmet Till for “eyeballing” a white lady, like a radio personality calling strong Black female athletes out of their names, like whatever stories of “race” that make Imus able to say such a thing!!)

- Negotiating cultural boundaries – like people on the boundaries the faith community has to post itself on the borders where they are needed in order to be with the people. Conversation partners are needed in order to be authentic and naked with each other. Along this same vein, identify a cross cultural support group for key leaders. As a leader, be able to step over the edge. You will meet a lot of good people that need your help.
- Multivocal – develop the capacity to be multi-vocal if you are going to be multicultural then you must be able to tell your stories in multiple voices. You have to speak the story in many different languages; using different texts.
- Incorporating the arts allows the visionary storytellers that are also prophetic and pastoral to be involved because they are the artists among you
- Change agents – become adept at change and learn to love change because you can't lead if you can't change your stories, leaders tell compelling stories
- Cultivate your spiritual practices because that is what will fuel your courage and spirituality and fortitude
- Model being a change agent and a multicultural boundary person. You have to be the change you want to see
- Clarity of mind – we have to know who we are in order to be co-authors in this new story and new community
- Failure – We have to create new stories and paradigms about failure so that we allow our failures to inform our success
- Leadership – multiculturalism requires leadership on the borders where many of the people we need to reach are at. Thus being on the margins to nurture and care

for the people there and help empower them toward the center. Adaptive leadership will be needed for this phase of the journey. This requires no longer having the right answers but instead having the right questions. Leadership requires knowing how to stand on the balcony to observe the big picture and stepping outside the system to detach ones self to be able to gain some objectivity.

- Multicultural – Become students of other cultures and not just voyeurs, but authentically engaging people and reaching out to the social services to visit and infuse some human capital as well as fiscal capital.
- Identity Development – the process of editing your stories as you narrate them and retell them to reflect our changing consciousness.

Politics of Religious Education

Education is never neutral. It is either subversive or submissive. UUism supports a theology of freedom, reason and liberation. Oppression is not just those that are the lowest but the power brokers are oppressed and would benefit from that understanding. religious professionals must continue to interrogate changing norms that influence curriculum development. Furthermore, while RE has done an exceptional job in highlighting world religions, it does not appear to have begun to tackle the implications for curriculum development that reflects global dimensions of issues like poverty, democratization, HIV/AIDS, war, famine and hunger and globalization. The lack of any curriculum that addresses International relations between UUs in this country and the 500,000 Unitarians around the world poses a glaring oversight in the 21st century in our global village.

Power Dynamics

Lewis stressed the need to deconstruct the story and text that congregations and denominations have created that may be posing obstacles. Perhaps UU's is that they cannot create multicultural congregations. Lewis reminds us that we have to change the composition of the conversation table, shifting and blending the UU culture to facilitate multiculturalism. (more-Emilie Townes) One way to shift the power dynamics is to invite new people to initiate ways they would like to serve the congregation rather than inviting them to join a committee.

Strategies

While the researcher does not presume to have any clear answers to some of the concerns about the lack of diversity in UUism and the implications for RE, a few suggestions might provide steps toward effective religious education:

- Intentional partnership between middle class and underclass congregations
- Deliberate networking with so called third world communities of faith, which places UUs in a posture of learner
- Integration of transformation theory into RE curriculum development that focuses on the reconstruction of the self or some dimension of experience of persons
- Initiate a RE conference with a focus on multicultural RE. Identify the top 3-5 denominations that have been successful in creating multicultural congregations and create a venue for them to share their knowledge and by all means pick their brains. Then hold a debriefing session among UU Religious Educators and critique what has been learned and how that relates to our RE curriculum

- Empower local DRE's to develop curricula based on feedback from focus groups and congregational surveys on what is needed.
- Form partnership with local, national and international multicultural congregations that are doing an outstanding job in RE. Arrange to visit, review their materials and observe. Utilize technology such as email, conference calling, websites, and blogs.
- Continue to look for ways to carry RE outside of the classroom and into the day to day lives of members and out into the community.

TO BE CONTINUED...