

LREDA GA WORKSHOP 2014 (111 min)
**The Ignored, the Naive and the Innocent:
Supporting our Children as They Navigate a Multicultural World [pp-1]**

If Trayvon Martin had grown up in a UU religious education program, would the outcome have been different? If not, how would we have dealt with the aftermath?

INTRODUCTION (5 min)

November 2008 St. Paul MN. I was at Unity Church, following the release of *In Between: Memoir of an Integration Baby*. I was in the parish hall having lunch when a man approached me. He wanted to talk about his sons. I hear urgency in his voice. They were adopted - came from South American, I think. Their dark skin I could see they were Indigenous. In reading *In Between* their father realization that as a white man he was clueless as to how to help prepare them for life in a racialized world in which it was likely they would, among other things, be stopped by police. What was he to do? What advice did I have to offer? I asked a few questions. If I had any advice, I do not remember feeling satisfied with it. You see, it wasn't something I had to think about. *I was raised to know.*

This must happen in other UU congregations. How would you advise that parent? What have you said? Do you understand that this is not so much a moral issue as one of survival? Their father's urgency makes sense.

As Unitarian Universalist religious educators our emphasis, from a place of comparative privilege, is the social, ethical and emotional upbringing of our children and the spiritual maturation of every congregant, but I want to take a particular slant on this task. We are adept at supporting white parents and children as they navigate our multicultural world; what I worry about is the emotional and physical survival of our children of color. 'Mark,' I say to myself 'don't be alarmist.' But then I think of Trayvon Martin and then of 16-year-old Yoshihiro Hattori, an exchange student living with the Haymakers a UU family in Baton Rouge, who was shot and killed on his way to a Halloween party in 1992 by the man on whose door he'd mistakenly knocked.

This is a challenging undertaking. Given the workshop sub-title I applaud you for showing up. It will be challenging because we are talking about life and death and violence, about race, prejudice and privilege. If only you just had to take it in while I, the expert, pontificated **but** I don't have the answer. I simply hope to create a space in which to begin this conversation.

The process we'll use takes into account that we cannot have such a discussion and not have feelings arise. We need a container within which we can deal with our anxieties because we are bound together by affection and commitment. The topic is difficult but process is not. [pp-2]

- I'll tell a story or describe a situation.
- You will listen.
- I'll pose a question for you to reflect on.

- You will turn to your partner and talk about what you *feel* and think.
- After that, I'll ask for a few people to share what came up.
- We'll follow that with a larger discussion in which we'll look for patterns or a consensus or new questions.
- We'll go through this cycle a half dozen times. It will move briskly and that will prove frustrating. A retreat would be a better format.

Why do it this way? This topic has the potential to quickly lead to feelings of guilt or inadequacy or defensiveness or judgment or anger and once we are captured by any of these the *supposed* discussion becomes a pretense to vent the unexpressed feelings. That said, there are a few rules that undergird this process. [pp-3]

- Confidentiality – the information belongs to the person who uttered it.
- Do not share anything you are not comfortable sharing.
- When listening be completely delighted with whatever the other person says (i.e. no judgment).
- Sometimes we'll move from feelings and experiences toward ideas, and sometimes vice versa.
- Beyond being affirming the listener should feel free to ask: How did that make you feel? What was that like for you?

Find a partner (1 min) - Practice this process by introducing yourself to the person next to you. [pp-4] (2 min each)

- What is your name?
- Your congregation?
- How do you identify in terms of race, ethnicity and class?
- What did you feel or think when you saw the title of the workshop?
- Why do you choose to be here?
- What do you hope will happen?

Ask for several people to speak to why they are here, how they feel and what they hope for. Ask: Do you know why I asked for you to name you race, ethnicity and class? Explain that one of trademarks of privilege is to assume your own position is normative. That puts you in the position of judging other people's experience and perspective while in denial that you, too, have a class and racial location. (4 min)

WHO ARE OUR CHILDREN? (4 min) [pp-5]

Racism impacts all of our children, though they experience it in different ways. Today I'm going to focus on our children of color and introduce a conversation we don't often have.

Racially and ethnically, who are our children? We don't know because we don't count. Should we? I don't know. It would be interesting to know, but would it be helpful? I'm not sure. Would we tailor our programs differently or develop different guidelines for curriculum development if we knew the fastest growing groups in our congregations are Hispanic and multi-racial? If we ignore that reality what are we saying?

August 1982 in Rochester, NY Ryan and Elliot arrived. Elliot was Donna and my second child. Ryan, who was days older, arrived second because he was flown from Korea. Ryan's parents, were members of the congregation. We'd submitted a reference letter and been interviewed. Add to Ryan and Elliot, Mattie Lawson's grandchildren, and later a Native American family and its R.E. program was slightly more diverse than its adult membership. When we served in Toronto the congregation was bigger and again the R.E. program was more diverse. Admittedly anecdotal, but I think typical.

What is known of the racial/ethnic makeup of the UU population is minimal. The adult UU population in 2008 was: 89% white, 4% multiracial, 3% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 1% Black and we have no figure on Native Americans. I don't think we know what percentage of UU religious education program are diverse, or what the break down is. What we experientially know is that its make-up is different from that of the adults filling our sanctuaries. We also know why - the children of interracial marriages and cross-cultural adoptions.

Demographically I have a better understanding of the situation among Canadian UUs. In 2012 they were about 4.3% diverse; the ethnic breakdown, however, is different than in the US and trending differently. We also discovered that 38% of that 4.3% are in mixed marriages, or are the children of mixed marriages or the children of cross-cultural adoption. When asked: "Because of the number of mixed marriages and cross-cultural adoptions in CUC congregations, the children in our religious education programs tend to be more ethnically diverse than the adult populations of our congregations. Is there special support we could offer multiracial/cultural families?" 71% said yes. Acceptance was mentioned, [pp-6] but the themes that appeared most often were: providing culturally diverse R.E., events and books that represent cultural diversity, a chance for children to share and to celebrate their cultures, to see themselves reflected in stories and programs, and to have role models who reflect who they are. These response are almost identical to those of parents in a 2003 in UUWorld article entitled "Transracial adoption enlarges congregations" (Jane Greer, June 2003).

The questions I want you to answer are: [pp-7] (3 min/each)

- What is the ethnic/racial make-up of your congregation's R.E. program? Be specific.
- Where and in what kind of neighborhood is your congregation located?
- What children in your neighborhood and city are not represented in the R.E. program?
- Talk about one racially charged or awkward situation that happened.

Ask: Are the young people in your congregation a more ethnically and racially diverse group than its adults? Why? Is there anyone here whose congregation has little or no diversity?

There are pockets where this must be true. For instance, in 2010 in Lexington MA where Dana Greeley grew up in a population of 31,394. There were 1.5% African Americans (i.e. 473).

What do your parents tell you? What kind of situations have arisen? (5 min)

FEARS [pp-8]

Let's enter indirectly into the world of an African-American parent. To do this I offer a piece written by Rosemary Bray McNatt. It is entitled "Fears." It describes what she feels when her husband doesn't return home on time. Without a doubt she has had even stronger feelings about their two sons.

This is a feeling exercise not a thinking one. Get comfortable in your chair. [pause] Take a deep breathe. [pause] Close your eyes. Now follow your breathe as it goes in and out. Notice any thought that arises, then let it go. Just you and your breathe.

You are in New York City. It's getting dark. Be Rosemary or at least be her silent companion. Someone you love is late. You're anxious. We have all had that feeling. It's in you. Feel it and listen. (1 min)

Read: "Fears" from *Been in the Storm So Long* (p.9). (2 min)

At the end pause and say breathe deeply and release it all, open your eyes, turn to you partner and just talk about what it felt like and what it reminded you of. (3 min/each)

Ask: What was that experience like? I imagine we feel this way about our daughter's. There are men out there who prey on women. That is bad and this is bad - just in a different way. What, in this case, is preying on black men? [pp-9] (5 min)

Speaking from my experience this is what it is like:

I can be jogging in the early morning or walking home at night when some white woman's deer-like alertness, sideways glance, and quickening pace as she heads across the street tells me I have been spotted. Suddenly, like I've been slapped, I'm forced to become aware of my color and gender. As an African-American man I am often compelled to see myself through others' fearful eyes. I understand it's a cultural deceit of mainline culture that misrepresents who I am. Yet, for me, it is dangerous not to know it is going on. (1 min)

Take a **5 minute** break and then we'll explore further what it is like being an African-American man in the United States of America.

Yes, Officer [pp-10]

2007. My weekly support group met in a Unitarian's home. I rang. No one answered. I rang again. I peered in. I stood and then sat on the front stairs. It was fairly long wait. A police car drove by. I noticed but didn't worry. The second time I thought 'Oh, shit.' It's a fairly upscale neighborhood. Had someone called 9-1-1? It cruised by again. It stopped. I sighed and got ready. 'Yes, officer' I said and explained. Now I am pretty sure my posture, my diction, the way I made eye contact instantly told him he needed to end this conversation asap but having started he needed to check my ID on his computer. By the time he returned the others had begun to arrive. First a few white women. They were pissed off and let him know it – something I didn't dare do. (1 min)

How many of you have been stopped by a police officer for no reason at all? Not because of a traffic violation. Not because you were part of a protest. For no reason at all except the officer thinks you do not belong there. (If it has happened to someone ask about the situation.) Why do you think my friends were indignant? (Let a couple of people address that). (2 min)

It is a matter of expectations. They thought the officer was supposed to be there to protect them not harass their friend. Being exhausted – it took an enormous amount of energy to get through that interaction, angry and grief-stricken I cried for 15 minutes. Why? I knew what was coming down. He saw a big black man and all that trigger in his head and that of the neighbor that had probably called. Did it have anything to do with who I am? No. But if it wasn't going to escalate – which would put me at even greater risk - I had to politely bring him back to reality.

1969. I am a 20-year-old VISTA volunteer working in Columbus, Ohio. It was late. Four of us—another volunteer, Rev. Don Huey and his wife, and I—broke up a bull session to find an all-night convenience store. I drove. We found one. As Ed went in, a black couple came out and walked to their car. A squad car pulled up, and a cop got out to question them. Don, who was white, jumped out of my car. *Man, are you brilliant or what?* I thought. I heard him say, "Hello, I'm the Reverend Don Huey. May I be of service?" I couldn't hear the cop's reply but I knew he was telling Don to mind his own business. Don returned. I was more than ready to get out of there, but he insisted we wait until the black couple drove away. *Jesus, Don just doesn't get it.* It was enough that the cops knew we were watching them, but now I knew they'd be watching me. If it was possible to ticket me, they would, and if it wasn't possible, they'd find a way. *With friends like this who needs...* Everything proceeded in slow motion. I pulled away from the curb, stopped at the light, switched on my turn signal, turned left. *Please, God.* The siren hailed, the cherries flashed, and a spotlight filled my rearview mirror. I pulled over. Totally paranoid, I placed my hands on the steering wheel so they'd be visible. The cop ambled up. I looked out my window at his protruding belly, then up to his scowling face. "Yes, Officer?" "Get out. Gimme your license." Then, pointing to the back of the car: "Com' here." My heart raced. *Oh shit! Maybe I'm going to get more than a ticket.* "Your rear license-plate light is burned out." My relief had turned to anger by the time he wrote out a twenty-five-dollar ticket, but I smiled and said, "Sorry" to the officer—and "Damn you" to Don Huey.

2009, July 16 Prof. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., arrived home after a trip to China and found his front door jammed. While he and the driver struggle to get it open a neighbor called 9-1-1. The police arrive after he has managed to get in and changed into a bathrobe. Still they demand to see his ID. It escalates from there and in the end the Sgt. Crowley arrested the renowned Harvard Prof. for disorderly conduct. My first thought was “What were you thinking?” Which is another way of saying what Colin Powell said. As a child he learned "not to argue with a police officer trying to do his or her job." You'll remember it became international media drama that ended up with Sgt. Crowley, Prof. Gates and President Obama having beer together in the White House garden.

Race was the major but not the only element in that clash of alpha-males. Yet does the neighbor dial 9-1-1 if it is a middle aged white man jiggling the door? What posture does the officer take when he finds a middle aged white man in his bathrobe? How does Prof. Gates react if his background doesn't include hundreds of years of abuse and concomitant wariness? Can he simply ignore all the conditioning?

I was raised to live by the Black Male Code, and so was Colin Powell and I'll bet you Louis Gates, too. I didn't have a name for it, I just knew it. The training started very early and my Mother made sure I knew.

So what is this Black Code? [pp-11] (5 min)

After you talk about your emotional reaction to these stories talk about what you think the Black Code is. (3 – 3 – 2 min)

With your partner come up with to two tenets of the “Black Male Code”. (5 min)

List these on newsprint one from each group, skipping repeats, then review and discuss.

The Black Male Code [pp-12]

2012, February 26, in Sanford Florida Trayvon Martin was shot and killed during an altercation with Neighborhood Watch coordinator George Zimmerman.

You know the story, you don't understand the historic context that fuels it.

In America anything that has to do with race is emotion-laden. Why? Psychologically speaking because it picks at our earliest wound. Early America was no empty frontier waiting to be settled by Europeans. That myth helps us evade the painful truth that the real "American Wilderness" is a moral one: The genocide of Native Americans—called "black ducks" by the English colonists who hunted them—was a sin compounded by the enslavement of kidnapped Africans—called "niggahs" as they were sold on the auction block. Deemed savages and brutes, neither group possessed any rights a white man was bound to respect, and so aboriginal land and African life-blood fed the infant nation's avarice. Indeed, the Constitution, our country's most sacred document and guarantor of freedom, had slavery written into it.

Around this trauma a complex formed. Its polarities are freedom and oppression. America stood for liberty and yet allowed, and thrived on, slavery. Having not yet figured out how to deal constructively with this history- or in any way atoned for it - the tension resides in our collective unconscious. Housed inside – rarely articulate much less understood and masked by the pretense that it has been resolved - it gets projected out there. This process, one of which we are quite unaware, can be seen in our hyper-sensitive to anything that touches on race. Its numinous, seizing our attention, raising anxiety.

The proof? Whether Trayvon Martin or Louis Gates it fills the media. A month after Martin was killed Jesse Washington wrote an article entitled "Trayvon Martin, my son, and the Black Male Code."

It began: "I thought my son would be much older before I had to tell him about the Black Male Code. He's only 12, still sleeping with stuffed animals, still afraid of the dark. But after the Trayvon Martin tragedy, I needed to explain to my child that soon people might be afraid of him."

As I explained it, the Code goes like this: [pp-13]

Always pay close attention to your surroundings, son, especially if you are in an affluent neighborhood where black folks are few. Understand that even though you are not a criminal, some people might assume you are, especially if you are wearing certain clothes.

Never argue with police, but protect your dignity and take pride in humility. When confronted by someone with a badge or a gun, do not flee, fight, or put your hands anywhere other than up.

Please don't assume, son, that all white people view you as a threat. America is better than that.

Suspicion and bitterness can imprison you. But as a black male, you must go above and beyond to show strangers what type of person you really are. (3 min)

Compare his code to that developed by the workshop participants? (6 min)

What are the similarities?

What are the differences?

[pp-14] The Black Male Code represents a conundrum for UUs. In our R.E. programs we recite the UU principles for children. [pp-15] “We believe that each and every person is important.” “We believe that all people should be treated fairly and kindly.” We treat our children with respect and tell them they are precious. They are encouraged to take initiative and be in charge. We assure them it is okay to challenge authority, and to speak up when they see injustice. This is as it should be, but I submit we are unaware that these attitudes that we inculcate into our children are putting some of them at risk because they do not know where to put their hands. And the fact that most UUs do not see that is a by-product of “white privilege.” (1 min)

White Privilege [pp-16]

A side effects of “white privilege” is this: it makes the vast majority of Euro-Americans unaware that there is a black male code. Here is a tiny example of white middle-class privilege in action:

1971. I am 22-years-old and with a bunch of schoolmates from Beloit College. We had flown into Shannon Airport near Limerick, Ireland. I’d hurried down the ramp to intentionally separate myself from the hung-over, sweat-shirt-clad rabble I was traveling with. I’d worn a corduroy sports coat, turtle neck and dress slacks for just this moment. When asked I told the immigration officer that I was there as part of a research project on human behavior. I sailed through customs. As I collected my luggage my name came over the PA system. I looked across the hall. There were my buddies pointing in my direction. Charlie Brown’s mouth was open in indignation. I returned to Immigration and went through my routine again—yes, we were traveling together, yes, they were part of the same project. As soon as possible, I slipped away only to hear my name echo from a loudspeaker again. Back I went and this time my passport was stamped with a six-month expiration date.

What happened there? [pp-17] To me, who is hyper-vigilant, it looks like they’re sleep walking through life. I grew up knowing that how I present myself in the world, and most especially with people who have authority matters. For whites, and particularly Euro-American, college-educated males there are many things with which they are not concerned and do not see. *That is the nature of white privilege.* There are lots of things white folks simply take for granted. These are just a few: [pp-18]

- Police do not stop you for no reason.
- Clerks do not follow you around the store.
- You take pride in your heritage and believe your behavior and mores are normal.
- You do not feel that you represent your race and must be a credit to it (I can still hear my mother in my head).
- You do not have to educate your children to be aware of systemic racism in order to keep them safe.

Why tell you this? In the Canadian Unitarian Council survey 71% of the participants agreed special support should be offered multiracial/cultural families. Take note that the needs expressed focused exclusively on the children rather than on the parents. What support do parents need while raising children who may require particular skills to navigate and succeed in a racially-rigged, Anglo-centric culture? The elixir that is “white privilege” leaves Caucasians unaware of, and therefore unprepared to help with, the challenges non-white children face. The concerns expressed in the UUWORLD essay likewise focused solely on who? The children.

Does this raise a red flag for you? It does for me. UU Euro-American ignorance and naiveté frightens me because I believe that ignorance and naiveté puts our dark-skinned children physically and emotionally at risk. To survive these children need to be prepared for a hostile, or at least not benign environment. That is what the father in St. Paul realized. Yet their parents, if white, are most often not attuned to it because they didn’t grow up with it. And our

general UU obliviousness cannot be an encouraging sign for parents who are of color. It would be reassuring to know that white allies understand, but I find well-intentioned do-gooders just don't get it. Moreover, there is information about systemic racism and white privilege that all our children need to be educated about; information they will not be taught in school.

If the UUA is serious about being an anti-racist, anti-oppression, multicultural bastion it has to make this a priority. All its programs need to reflect that. The question I want to leave you with is: *Once we have created a safe, supportive, diverse and affirming space for our children what kind of support/education do their parents need?* [pp-19] Do we think we can do it without them? Perhaps, the most important thing a church school can do is to help parents become aware of the values their *lives* are teaching their children. That happens at home. R.E. is ancillary. And yet most of our parents are unaware of, much less have the language to talk about, the black male code or white privilege.

You, as religious educators, cannot do this work unless you have begun to deal with your own fears and lack of knowledge. I understand that being responsible for R.E. you are over worked and often underpaid and stretched to find volunteers and pressed by everything inherent in our R.E. culture, including sometimes feeling marginalized. My guess is that emotionally what I have been leading you through may feel overwhelming. It is *one more thing to do*, and in this case, one more thing to feel guilty about if you do not. (6 min)

Now take a breath, turn to your partner and talk about: How does it feel to be challenged in this way? [pp-20] (4 min/each)

Invite responses...(5 min)

What Can We Do to Better Nurture UU Children of Color? [pp-21]

Talking with liberals about race feels like walking a tight-rope. You get a few who are angry and defensive. More try very hard and in the process can become so self-righteous they are unpleasant to be around. And, perhaps most who, feeling guilty and overwhelmed, become paralyzed. You may feel bad about this. You know it is unfair. It is a justice issue and the world needs to change. You want prejudice to end. You want to feel you are on the right side and doing the right thing. Of course, that is true, but the reality is that is not going to happen tomorrow – either for yourself or the world. What you need to do is figure out how to honestly face your feelings – which are completely understandable - and then get down to figuring how best to support the families of dark skinned children.

When I set out to put this workshop together I felt like I owed you an answer. Well, I do not have one. If we had an answer we would have tried to implement it. But we barely know how to approach this volatile issue, and when we have it has blown up in our face more often than not; and that has made us cautious.

This is my suggestion: [pp-22] Go home and struggle some more with these issues. See them not as a task but as an opportunity to grow,[pp-23] and remember in this work mistakes are inevitable so enjoy making them. See them as the learning opportunities that they are. Also it cannot be done alone because it is going require a change in congregational culture.[-24] You'll need to invite others into the conversation - your colleagues and parents to create a community of learners. Once you commit to have the conversation and keep it going – because in those congregations that succeed in becoming diverse it took a decade for it to become part of its identity - then there lots of things you can do.

- [pp-25] Invite the interracial couples and parents who have adopted cross-culturally to tell you what their experience has been like. Ask them how the R.E. program can support not only their children but *them*.
- [pp-26] Convene a group to read Peggy McIntosh essay “White Privilege; Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” <http://amptoons.com/blog/files/mcintosh.html> Then explore how you experience privilege in your life now and how understanding will help you to become a more effective ally.
- [pp-27] Ask a person of color or someone Hispanic or someone who is willing to stretch themselves to try to see through the eyes of a non-Anglo-Euro-American to walk through your Sunday School from that perspective. It has to be someone capable of not getting caught up in the “we are all alike” ideology. Ask someone else to examine the roster of teachers with an eye for their background. Someone else should look at the curriculum with a discerning eye for what it says about diversity. Each should report to your R.E. Committee about what she or he saw. Discuss what you hear. Decide to do one thing that is easy and you can succeed at.
- [pp-28] Convene a group to read *In Between: Memoir of an Integration Baby*. It gives insights into what it is like to be an African-American raised as a UU. You'll find a discussion guide on the Skinner House Books Website.
<http://www.uua.org/publications/skinnerhouse/171284.shtml>

- [pp-29] Finally, you don't need to wait to do something. I strongly encourage you to join Mark Hicks, the Angus McLean Professor of Religious Education at M/L and I on Saturday at 10:15 for the M/L Lecture. I will talk about why UUs got stuck in regard to race while Mark will presents an innovative approached called "Beloved Conversations" that offers a strategy that links spiritual awakening to practices that nurture multiculturalism in our congregations and lead us forward. (5 min)

(Entertain a few questions.) (4 min more or less depending whatever there is time for)

The possibilities are endless. What is needed is, within your realm of responsibility to try. We desire all kinds of stuff but this calls for more than that. It needs the urgency I saw in that father in St. Paul. Let yourself feel that some of our kids are at risk, that our parents need support, that there is a vision of the way you would like the world to be and it begins in your classrooms. Embrace your own yearning to become awake, to see more clearly, to live a life more consonant with your values, to heal.

Please join me in reciting these closing words.

A Prayer for Living in Tension. [pp-30]

If we have any hope of transforming the world and changing ourselves,
we must be:

bold enough to step into our discomfort,
brave enough to be clumsy there,
loving enough to forgive ourselves and others.

May we, as a people of faith, be granted the strength to be:
so bold,
so brave,
and so loving.

~Joseph M Cherry (1 min)

Thank you! [PP-31]