

The Prophetic Imperative: Living the UU Social Gospel
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Music in our worship services isn't a form of entertainment or performance art. It's a form of worship, just like words—just as important as words and maybe more important. I learned that when I was working in the civil rights movement in the late 1950's and the early 1960's, when I was in junior high and high school. How does a middle-class white kid from the suburbs like me learn to sing *Go Down, Moses*? You learn it on the long bus ride to Selma or Montgomery, or marching all day from a small African Methodist Episcopal church to the front of the local high school, or sitting outside a polling place on election day, when every time an African-American tries to vote and is turned away because he is illiterate or she can't pay the poll tax, it's time to sing. If, like Reverend King, you are committed to an ethic of nonviolent passive resistance, then the anger and pain that you are feeling cannot go into your fists, it has to go into your feet and into your voice. And music becomes a form of prayer, as it has been in all the religions that we know about as far back as we can know human history. Sometimes the music in worship calms us so we can find our inner self in the quiet. Sometimes we rejoice with music; sometimes we grieve, but music is an essential part of our worship. It gives us experiences that cannot be reached through words and puts us in touch with feelings and forces larger than ourselves.

Some songs, like *If I Had a Hammer* and *We Shall Overcome*, are hymns of affirmation, rededication, and group solidarity. Others, like *Go Down, Moses* and *Battle Hymn*, are calls to action. They are marching songs that command the faithful to pledge themselves to the work at hand. I'd like for all of you who were able to sing these songs by heart to pause and think for a moment about the times when you sang them—who you were then, who you are now. The UUA has, in the last two decades, asked for a recommitment of its congregations to the cause of racial justice. Those of us who were a part of this important project for Unitarians in the 1950's and 1960's remember it very well. In fact, it's easy for us to look around and say: "Oh, but we did all that. Racial prejudice is a thing of the past. Our society is fully integrated now. Discrimination in housing is illegal; our schools celebrate their diversity." If we don't actually eat lunch at the local high school, we don't see all the Asian kids sitting together and all the African-American kids sitting together and all the white kids sitting together, all at different tables. If we don't go to school board meetings where they argue endlessly about how to draw school boundaries, then we don't have to think too hard about how racially diverse our neighborhoods truly are. If we don't work at the polls, we do not see the struggles of the disenfranchised to exercise their right to be part of the political process. If we look only at how far we have come, it's easy to be complacent. It's easy to be satisfied with a little progress and not to look at how far we still have to go.

Last night my church choir joined the UU church of Silver Spring choir for a performance of the *Missa Gaia*. In between the dress rehearsal and the performance, their choir practiced for this morning. They were doing *Wade in the Water* and *Go Down, Moses*. I said to someone—"That is so weird; I am doing the service at Gettysburg tomorrow and I picked the exact same hymns." She looked at me, a little bewildered, and said, "Of course. It's Passover." Indeed it is. Many of the families displaced Africans became converts to Christianity and quickly embraced the story of the Hebrew people escaping from slavery in Egypt as a metaphor for their own struggles and a promise that God would rescue them too. You can hear his message in almost all of their

powerful music. Their Red Sea, and River Jordan, was the Ohio River—on one side slavery; on the other, freedom. Harriet Tubman, who will now be gracing our \$20 bill, was known universally as Black Moses.

Nobody under fifty remembers what our society was like when Peter, Paul, and Mary were at the top of the charts. Nobody under sixty remembers going to segregated schools. When my kids first started hearing racial epithets, mainly from my father's relatives, and they started asking me about words like "spade" and "coon," I remember sitting down with them and saying "When I was a little girl, people used to think that everyone with brown skin was born naturally stupider than people with white skin, and that women were naturally stupider than men too." And I will never forget the way they looked at me—like "We knew grown-ups were idiots, but that absolutely is the most ridiculous idea we ever heard." And that's a good thing. But it's just a start.

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This morning, I would like to tell you two stories. The first is the story of my dad, James W. Culbertson, M.D., author of the book *Wound Ballistics* and the second is the story of one of my students at the University of Baltimore, Dwight (D) Watkins, author of the book, *The Beast Side: Living and Dying while Black in America*. Between them, you will find me—trying to pay it forward and leave the world a little better than I found it, because that's what my church taught me to do with my life.

My dad stayed around for a full year after World War II ended in Europe to write this book on what ordnance can do to the human body and what surgeons can and cannot do to give the wounded their lives back. When he returned to the U.S. in 1946, he got out of surgery and became an internist, working in preventive medicine for the rest of his career—trying to stop bad things from happening in the first place rather than seeking to fix them after they had already gone wrong. Like so many of his generation, World War II was seminal for him. He went overseas with his classmates from the University of Virginia School of Medicine, which had mobilized itself into an Army Evac Hospital that followed General Patton around from North Africa up into Italy cleaning up the human debris. One of his transformative experiences was learning that the Army had regulations against transfusing blood across races. Your Hippocratic oath notwithstanding, you were supposed to let someone die rather than give him blood from someone of a different race. My dad, who was from a racist, anti-Semitic family from a small, poor, racist town in piedmont South Carolina, had concerns that his fellow doctors from the aristocratic, oh-so-white University of Virginia, built by slaveowners to educate their sons, not their property, would hesitate before—reluctantly--obeying the Army rule. He was wrong. Everyone said, "To hell with that," and gave any blood that was the right match to anyone who needed it. He discovered to his astonishment that he was not the only white Southerner who believed that all human beings were created equal.

Of course, I wasn't around then and didn't hear that story until years later, when my parents sat us down at the kitchen table right before my eleventh birthday and explained

that we were moving from Iowa City, Iowa to Memphis, Tennessee. It was 1958. My dad had given up his job as director of the Cardiovascular Research Lab at the University of Iowa to take a comparable but lower-paying job at the University of Tennessee School of Medicine. "Iowa City isn't the real world," he and my mother explained. They were trying to make us understand that the new schools we were going to would be segregated because some people believed that white people and black people shouldn't go to school together. "Lots of us, especially people from the church, are trying to change people's minds about that," he said, "but this movement, we call it the 'civil rights movement,' isn't going to be successful until white people, especially white Southerners, stand up and say: 'This is wrong. It has to change.' Black people can't do it by themselves. People will find a way not to listen to them. We have to support them and insist that people listen." Later, they would have to explain to us why our next-door neighbors, a nice elderly couple who used to give us cookies and let us watch their tv, were suddenly distant, and we were no longer welcome to come into their back yard and visit. Instead of putting our house on the market, my parents had offered it directly to the first and then-only African-American faculty member at Iowa, Dr. Philip Hubbard, a distinguished professor of hydraulic engineering whose kids attended the University School with us. The Hubbards were still living in an apartment with five kids because no one in Iowa City would sell them a house. Our neighbors on the other side tried to red-line the loan and they had to go to a Des Moines bank to get a mortgage but eventually it all went through because they had been putting aside money for years, and off we went to the war zone that was the Deep South in the late fifties.

When people ask me if the Unitarian church in the sixties was deeply involved in the antiwar movement, I tell them truthfully that the Unitarian church in those days was passionately, tirelessly, consumed with civil rights. The Unitarian church does not have a history of pacifism—in fact, it has a history of going to war over principles and of great heroism and personal martyrdom. Unitarians were leaders in the fight for American independence and in the abolitionist struggle prior to the Civil War. They have always been strong advocates for freedom and against slavery of any kind. As I explain to our Coming of Agers when I take them to Boston, Unitarians were among the revolutionary rabble throwing rocks at the British soldiers in what came to be called the Boston Massacre. But it was also Unitarian lawyers who later defended the British soldiers against murder charges that had been brought against them for firing into the crowd. After all, they were peacekeepers being attacked by an angry mob and had good reason to fear for their lives—and John Adams and Josiah Quincy felt they deserved a fair trial.

Benjamin Rush, William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Parker, and Julia Ward Howe were leaders of the abolitionist movement. Robert Gould Shaw, a 25-year-old captain in the Union Army whose parents were members of King's Chapel in Boston, volunteered to lead the 54th Massachusetts, the all-Black regiment immortalized in the film *Glory*, when every other more experienced white officer who was approached refused the command. When he learned that his soldiers were not being paid the same wage as the white Union soldiers, he led them in refusing to take any pay at all until the inequality was rectified and they

were all awarded back pay. I tell the Coming of Agers this story too, when we visit Boston and stop by the Shaw Memorial on Boston Common, right up from the statue of Edward Everett Hale, another powerful Unitarian anti-slavery spokesman. These from Hale appear on the plaque at the base of his statue:

“I am only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something.
The something I ought to do, I can do. And by the grace of God, I will.”

This quotation is at the heart of my message to you. My father never considered it his mission in life to single-handedly end racial discrimination in the South and elsewhere. In fact, he placed most of his confidence in the public schools to do that, believing that education was the great leveler across racial, economic, class, and cultural divides. All he asked himself was: “What can I do? I cannot do everything, but I can do something.” He did a lot more than attend a few protest marches with his friends and write a few checks. He moved his family back to where the war was taking place. He hired African-Americans, particularly women with children to support, to work for him as lab techs and office assistants, paid them well, and promoted them to increasingly responsible jobs. He and other church members and community leaders created a private luncheon club, The Wolf River Society—it was actually called The Wolf River Society for the Prevention of Taking Oneself Too Seriously--where blacks and whites could get together over lunch to talk politics and plan, since they were not allowed to eat together in the local restaurants. He took care of us after my mother got herself onto the board of the local Urban League so she could go to the meetings and stay out late. In 1964, after the Civil Rights Act was passed, and Memphis was forced to desegregate its schools, my parents sold their house and moved into a downtown apartment so my brother and sister could attend the only integrated high school, Memphis Central. I had gone to White Station High School in the suburbs, where I had managed to avoid getting myself injured or killed, but not from lack of effort on my part.

My sister Jane and I were also very involved in the civil rights movement through the church. For the Culbertsons, the battle for civil rights was a family struggle. My parents taught us that to stand to the side and live safely and enjoy your white privilege while the struggle for justice was going on all around you made you part of the problem, not part of the solution. We stepped forward to help shoulder the burden with teenagers like Claudette Colvin, mothers like Fannie Lou Hamer and Viola Liuzzo, college students like Sammie Younge and Bernice Johnson Reagon (now curator *emerita* at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History), elderly women like Mother Pollard, and children like Ruby Bridges because it was a religious obligation. All that is necessary for evil to triumph is that good people do nothing.

My sister and I drove people in Mississippi to register to vote. We sat in groups outside polling places to make sure that Black people who tried to vote weren't hassled or asked to take literacy tests or pay poll taxes. I sat in the backs of buses and drank from colored water fountains and waiting in colored waiting rooms, enduring the angry glares from

middle-aged Black folks who were sure—probably correctly—that I was going to get them into trouble. Jane and I got called *all* the names; that's how we knew we were making the point that there were white people who supported equality for everyone. My parents let me come to the March on Washington (I was 16) because I would be able to stay with my aunt and uncle in Rockville and march with the congregation from All Souls, where my other aunt and uncle had been members before moving to Michigan. They wouldn't let me go to Selma because they thought it was too dangerous. Turns out they were right. As you probably all know, my cousin J.D.'s youth minister at All Souls, Jim Reeb, was killed there. That fall, they sent me to college at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, home of the Woolworth's lunch counter sit-ins, because they figured the town had already been introduced to college students with my political opinions. UNC-G had begun admitting African-American students in 1956, right after the passage of Brown vs. Board of Education, but I was in the first class after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and, as I learned recently, when I went back for my 45th reunion, ours was the first class in which black students were not put on the first floors of the dorms by themselves, with all the other rooms left empty, so that the white students would not be required to share bathrooms with them. I should have realized; in those days Black people were not allowed to actually try on clothes while shopping but had to guess at what size might fit them, and they couldn't return anything once they had bought it because stores couldn't take a chance that they might have tried it on at home.

Since landmark civil rights legislation had been passed in the spring before my first year at UNC-G, there wasn't much going on when I arrived, except concerts in which we all relived the glory days of the great battle. The apocalypse came when I was a senior. On April 4, 1968, the day before I was scheduled to come home to Memphis for spring break, Reverend King was shot and killed there. The city was devastated. With some trepidation, our parents took Jane and me downtown for the memorial march on Monday, but they were not going to tell us not to go and there was no danger. What struck me most was that there were almost no white people to be seen.

In his book, *The Prophetic Imperative*, and the racial justice workshop that goes with it, UU minister Richard Gilbert describes five types of social justice work that individuals and groups like churches can engage in: social service, social education, social witness, social advocacy, and community organizing. When he gave the workshop at a church I was attending some years ago, he said in passing: "Some people do this work every day just as part of their ordinary lives." It was not until he said it that I realized that my parents, and my church, had raised me to be one of those people. To quote Susan B. Anthony, "I pray every single second of my life; not on my knees, but with my work."

Reading Gilbert's book helped me see that my very presence at that march was both social witness and social advocacy. What can I do? I cannot do everything, but I can do something. I can be a white person grieving with her Black brothers and sisters at our

shared loss. I can show the Black people of Memphis that some white people are in mourning. I see now, looking back, that my efforts to use the colored facilities wherever possible were also acts of social witness. If there is enough powerful witness, advocacy becomes easier. If so many white people drink from the colored water fountain that there is no point in having one, then eventually they will have to get rid of it. If no one patronizes the restaurants and hotels that will not serve Black people, they will have to close. But enough people have to do it for it to work. Social change comes about because of thousands of individual tiny acts of justice. As an educator, I have spent my life using articles of witness and acts of advocacy to inspire young people to witness and advocate in their own lives. That is community organizing: it is rooted in ideas but it takes form in action. My first job was at a historically Black college, the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, where the majority of my students were not only African-American but first-generation college students. After three years at UMES, I took the job at the University of Baltimore that I still hold and became a teacher of nontraditional students—veterans, late bloomers, first college failures, all those marginalized young people for whom college is not a middle-class entitlement but a real dream.

For over forty years I have worked at UB with extraordinary colleagues like your own Kris Eysell to teach students who went to crappy high schools and have good grades but crappy test scores. By the time they graduate, we get them caught up with their counterparts at the prestige schools who were the unconscious and cavalier beneficiaries of wealth and privilege. One of my students was D. Watkins, who was a history major at UB while I was the honors director. His honors thesis was a short original film called *Eleven Minutes* about the crack cocaine industry in East Baltimore, where he grew up. Because he had once been a fairly successful drug dealer himself before leaving the life behind and deciding to concentrate on school, he was able to get people to give him interviews and let him film them cooking cocaine into crack, making sales, chatting with one another about running a drug business, and the like. It is an extraordinary piece of work, especially for an undergraduate, and he leveraged it into a Master's program at Hopkins before returning to UB for an MFA in Creative Writing and Publishing Arts. He has, in King's words, "been to the mountaintop" but he has found his voice back in East Baltimore; his mission as a writer is to speak for those who do not really have a voice, to speak for the people who will probably not be listened to.

Here is D's take on the state of being a young African-American male in Baltimore:

"Freddie Black" is what GD and some of his other friends called him. His real name was Freddie Gray. Gray, 25, was minding his business near Gilmore Homes when the cops tried to stop him for no apparent reason. He ran, like a lot of black men do when we see cops, because for our generation, police officers have been the most consistent terrorists in our neighborhoods. Plus we are currently in a culture where a cop can shoot you if you put your hands up, or if you follow their directions, or if you lie down, or if you are asleep. ..

A pack of BCPD officers pursued Gray in traditional bully fashion, caught him, found a legal pocketknife and arrested him for no reason. Who knew that running with a pocketknife is against the law in Baltimore? Once they got Gray into the van, he seems to have been taken on what we call a Nickel Ride, which is basically when cops rough you up, throw you in a van, and then drive crazy so your body bangs around the back of the vehicle like a pinball until you reach the police station.

The cops who arrested Gray apparently took it to another level, severing his spinal cord and smashing his voice box. Police officers are responsible for following the rules provided by the Red Cross: "Do not bend, twist or lift the person's head or body, do not attempt to move the person before medical help arrives unless it is absolutely necessary and do not remove any clothing if a spinal injury is suspected." Instead these officers handled Gray's nearly lifeless body like a sack of dirty laundry, probably causing further damage to his spinal column.

Gray died in the hospital days later. Now it's national news and protests are popping up all over the city. Mobs of people, sick of the stories of innocent kids like Gray being murdered over and over again.

America is in a state of emergency. I'm not sure why I don't see the president setting our terrorist level at bright orange, because the story of a cop killing an innocent black person surfaces every week. It's important that we use the term 'innocent' when describing these victims because, in America, you are innocent until proven guilty and these slain African-Americans aren't getting their day in court. There's so many cop killings in the news right now that I'd be surprised if any black person stopped on command — black bodies are piling up, and I can't even keep up with the names anymore.

Lately I've been having that cop talk a couple times a week with my nieces, nephews, or with young people at high schools and middle schools. I tell them most of these officers who are committing these murders are scared, racist and ignorant, so it's up to you to understand, because those cops will never understand or care about you. They are part of a long history of Americans who don't see value in African and African-American life, leading all the way back to the days of slavery when it was legal to treat blacks as subhuman. Back when our own American legal system identified black people as being three-fifths of a human. And then I leave them with some rules to follow, things we as black people need to know when dealing with cops or being stopped by law enforcement in general.

1) Police officers are like mice — they are more scared of you than you are of them, so don't startle or they will shoot. Things that startle them include speaking loud, being black, moving your hands, and running. If you move your hands or run, they could kill you.

2) Answer their questions in a clear manner. Expressing anger scares them and could lead to your death. Remind them that you are a person; sometimes they forget or were never taught that black people were human. Tell them that you don't have weapons and assure

them that they are safe. When police officers don't feel safe around black people, they shoot.

3) Remember that most of the police officers in your neighborhood aren't heroes. They aren't in your neighborhood to protect you, but to enforce laws. They don't become cops to save black neighborhoods. They become cops for the salary that comes with a nice retirement and benefits package. Real heroes care about you. They invest time and energy into your well-being. Cops in black neighborhoods don't.

4) Never think a cop won't shoot you. Your blackness makes you a target to them and in many cases it doesn't matter if you are guilty or innocent."

The same message is captured in an anonymous tweet that went viral: "Asking a black person to act 'respectfully' to avoid getting killed is like asking a woman to dress 'appropriately' to avoid rape."

That a Black person can be perceived as a threat simply for being Black was brought home powerfully this week when the Reverend Dr. William Barber, president of the North Carolina NAACP and the leader of North Carolina's Moral Mondays, was removed from a plane in Washington--apparently for Flying while Black--after he stood up from his seat and turned around so he could see and speak directly to another passenger who was harassing him loudly from the row behind his. This only a few days after a student at Cal—Berkeley was removed from a plane and questioned by the FBI for talking in Arabic to his uncle and—in particular—for ending the conversation with "in shah allah," which simply means "God willing," as in "God willing and the creek don't rise."

Returning to *The Beast Side*, "Like many, I am tired of the same old, same old when it comes to the inequality of justice in America. No black person is safe. Kids, grannies, city workers, hustlers, church boys, prom queens, junkies, whatever—they'll murder you. These killings happen almost every day in America, so much that the newspapers should print a daily death count, with photos of the casualties, like they do during wartime—because for black America, this is wartime. *The Guardian* recently reported that police will kill blacks this year at twice the rate of whites, and this is the norm.

If some racist cop isn't gunning us down, then a racist psycho is trying to do the same. Imagine how the cops would have reacted if a hate-spewing black extremist had shot up a white church prayer meeting, telling his victims as he blasted them at point-blank range, "I'll give you something to pray about!" Talking about white privilege and its role in these shootings always makes white people uneasy—probably because no one wants to feel like they have an unfair advantage over another person solely based on skin color. However, if you are white in America, you have an unfair advantage solely based on skin color, so deal with it. You'll probably go to a better school, never be profiled by police officers, get lower interest rates, and always have the luxury of walking around convenience stores in peace. Karl Alexander of Johns Hopkins University recently completed 35 years of research dealing with the poor white experience vs. the poor black experience. He published his

findings in the book, *The Long Shadow*, where he wrote that whites use more drugs, but are less likely to be charged — and in Baltimore, where 97 percent of the black people who are born in poverty die in poverty, it's easier for a white person with some jail time to get a job than a black person with some college.

Before I became a reader, I had no problem breaking a Hennessy bottle across the back of some guy's head. That type of anger in me was solely attributable to an inability to communicate. It's the same anger many officers patrol with and identical to the anger that exists in the poorest parts of Baltimore. Reading has transformed me and caused me to channel that anger into strategic solution-based thinking, the kind of thinking that will be key to fixing our cities. I want to encourage more young and poor minorities to write and raise as much awareness as possible about the ills we all face. Telling our stories and educating people are the best things we can do, if we hope to pull ourselves out of this bloody mess."

The "bloody mess" that D describes here is eerily familiar to me. The growing list of names of murder victims, the increased press coverage of a rising tide of civil unrest, the repeal of the Voting Rights Act, which has opened the door for states to install obstacles to voting for minority populations, the persistence of disproportionate levels of poverty among minority populations, the rising levels of irrational fear not only of our Black citizens but of our Latino citizens and now of those of Middle Eastern origin or ethnicity, plus all Muslims, not just the fanatical extremists.

I have seen this hate before. I have seen the rage before. I have heard the pleas to wait and use moderation. I have heard the answer, "If not now, when?" I don't see a single, magnetic, charismatic leader like King relentlessly turning the demand away from individual rights and toward global justice, to equal protection under the law, to safety from those charged with our protection like the police and the National Guard—or perhaps the British Army. The voices of those who hate—on both sides—are louder than the voices of reason. Or, worse, where there should be reason, there is appeasement, or rationalization, or simple cowardice. As Yeats put it in *The Second Coming*, "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity." But I also see that, fifty years later, my student arrives at the same conclusion as my dad. Education is the silver bullet. We must educate one another.

Tomorrow is the one-year anniversary of what is now being called the Baltimore Uprising. To me, the most astonishing and hopeful thing about last spring in Baltimore was that the city refused to let the uprising last more than a day. After one night of looting and burning, the people of Baltimore sought out one another to join hands and reclaim the city. Clergy and other leaders arranged for a peaceful march from the train station downtown to provide evidence of the city's determination to attack its very real problems without resorting to self-destructive violence. The University closed at 2 to accommodate the march, which started across the street from campus, and opened its parking lots so marchers could park for free. The Baltimore Symphony, which is right next door to us,

played a concert in the street in front of Symphony Hall—and welcomed the public to come and listen before joining the march. The University turned itself into a giant teach-in—closing only in time for people to get home before curfew, a curfew that was lifted well before the week for which it had originally been imposed. The Baltimore district attorney indicted the police officers and started the process of letting the criminal justice system do its work. The first trial ended in a hung jury but at least not in an outright acquittal. More trials are coming. The city settled with Freddie Gray’s family. Last fall, and again this spring, we are teaching a course called *Divided Baltimore* that is open to the public and features a blog to which people within and outside the university can contribute after attending or listening to the web-streamed lectures and panel discussions of the origins and perpetuation of racial divides in the city and their relationship to housing, health care, crime, and policing. At UB, we have lots of students who are Baltimore City police officers. In our classes, those students and the citizens they protect and serve can discuss their troubled relationship in a safe environment where everyone can be heard.

During that week of intense press coverage of the Baltimore Uprising, D got published in the *New York Times* and interviewed on CNN because his essays had already been appearing in *Salon* and *The Guardian* and he was starting to become the spokesman for Black urban youth brought up in poverty and surrounded by crime. In fact, he now describes himself wryly as the “Go-To Negro” for this perspective. Our MFA program in Creative Writing sponsored a reading by our faculty and students, including D and Derick Ebert, the youth poet laureate of Baltimore and, for a change, the *Sun* and a couple of the tv stations covered it. People spoke and people listened. Then, six weeks later, Dylann Roof took a handgun into a Bible study group, and the protests moved to Charleston, and the murder rates soared because the Baltimore police were hesitant or, with good reason, outright afraid to do their jobs.

To cite Martin Luther King quoting our own Theodore Parker, “The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.” Right now it just feels as if all we did was to get rid of the silly laws about clothes and swimming pools and stop debating whether a Black man was smart enough to be an NFL quarterback and now we have stopped working at it—just when it is becoming clear that we didn’t do nearly enough to get at the underlying problems of a racist socioeconomic infrastructure. Clearly, we need to step up again. Electing our first African-American president, which I never thought would happen in my lifetime, wasn’t an announcement of the arrival of the post-racial era; rather, it has touched off a series of explosions of race hatred that have a virulence I haven’t seen since I was a kid. And now it is all on YouTube and Facebook and Instagram for everyone to witness. Thank God we have D to tell us that this is pretty routine in East Baltimore, Ferguson, Southside Chicago and you name it.

There is now a Facebook group on the topic of race relations called *Are UU Awake?* One of the reasons it came into being is because River Road UU Church in Bethesda, Maryland put a *Black Lives Matter* banner outside their church last summer. It was almost immediately vandalized; the word “Black” was cut out. They replaced it. It was vandalized again, then

stolen. Primarily because the church is in an affluent, white neighborhood in a wealthy white suburb of presumably liberal Montgomery County, Maryland, the event made the *Washington Post* and then the national news, and the practice quickly went viral. The minister, the Reverend Nancy McDonald Ladd, went on tv and said quite firmly that they would replace the sign as many times as they had to.

The fourth banner is still there—intact, and every Friday they hold a social witness vigil right by it on River Road so all the commuters driving by can see them. On its website, the UUA has the following statement from their Minister of Congregational Life, the Reverend Louise Green: “To display the sign, *Black Lives Matter*, is an act of cultural resistance, of public witness. The aim and desire is to keep the spotlight on the complex set of issues affecting Black people in this country, dating from slavery through to 2015. Not since the Civil Rights Era has there been such a sustained commitment to make broad change. Black Lives Matter is a statement about that renewed commitment, a vow to keep looking, watching, and struggling.”

The UUA now has guidelines on its website for what to do if your *Black Lives Matter* banner is vandalized. To quote Marc Lamont Hill of Morehouse College, BET News, and CNN: “Nothing is more indicative of white supremacy than the fact that that the phrase ‘Black Lives Matter’ is controversial.”

Beverly Unitarian Church in Chicago responded quite differently from River Road. When they put “Black Lives Matter” on their outdoor sign, it led to a vicious hate campaign against the church on Facebook. After three days, they replaced “Black Lives Matter” with “Life Matters: Risk Loving Everyone.” Here is an excerpt from their open letter of explanation: “We felt the message behind these words--that for too long black citizens have been demonstrably less valued--could inspire us all to look at how we might change...Since this posting, we have been made aware that there is a movement associated with these words that has been accused of being anti-white, anti-police and a terrorist group. We are being educated and are looking at this other side of this. It seems that many in our neighborhood believe these accusations and have been offended and personally hurt by our posted words.”

By all means, Beverly, offend no one. Is this what we have come to? The “we” to which you refer doesn’t seem to include any actual Black people. Do you have any Black folks in your congregation? You might want to ask why not. It looks to me as if you are capitulating to the people who say you have no right to your opinion because there are other differing opinions. There are always differing opinions. Unitarianism and Universalism themselves were differing opinions, minority opinions. If the people in the church did not agree among themselves about putting up the sign, that is one thing, but if principles are being sacrificed on the altar of public relations and we have suddenly become risk-averse, then we have to hand over our tattered standard to other churches and say: “Sorry, you have done a better job than we have in standing up for our first and second principles.”

“Black Lives Matter” and “All Lives Matter” are not interchangeable. It is a simple syllogism. “All Lives Matter” is an axiom, the major premise. “Black Lives Matter” is a conclusion. If all lives matter, then Black lives matter. The missing minor premise, the enthymeme, is that the lives of black people are equal to all other lives. Black people are people, not 3/5 of a person, not someone’s property, and not “beasts.” They too are entitled to “life” under our constitution. That premise was not in the original Constitution, mind you, but it has since been added, via several amendments. And if the major premise and the minor premise are true, the conclusion is inevitable. If all lives matter and if Black people are part of the “all” and not outside it—then Black Lives Matter. French lives matter. Syrian lives matter. Belgian lives matter. Christian lives matter. Jewish lives matter. Muslim lives matter. That is the first principle—no lives matter more than other lives. The first principle drives the second principle: justice, equity, and compassion for all, not just for those who are perceived to have somehow earned it or to somehow deserve it. No conditions. That second principle is our whole heritage as a religion. It is the prophetic imperative. Do you accept Unitarian Universalism as a faith whose principles are more than just nice guidelines but in fact are axioms that are binding on you with the power of religious law? Like my father, will you answer the call?