

## **WHITE FRAGILITY, INCLUSION, ACCEPTANCE & MULTICULTURALISM**

### **PART II**

#### *Making Changes--Being the Change*

For many of us, voting helps. It helps us to express our frustration with the way things are and have been for at least the last two years. It also helps to make a difference. The House is now in Democratic hands, though the Senate may be even more firmly held by Republicans. Gains have been made among Governors and State Legislatures. The vote differential of some ten million more Democratic votes over Republicans is even more telling. Too bad that the Republicans have been so much more successful at Gerrymandering. Voting may be the best or most important thing that we do to bring about change, but it is not the only thing. We will have to see what difference the change in the balance of power will make. I was hoping for an even more dramatic repudiation of the culture of lies that now permeates public discourse and politics. Trump's base remains loyal, seemingly believing whatever outrageous thing he says. Even here in California, lies told about candidates and propositions seem to have been quite successful in several contests.

My biggest post-midterm concern is not even the unbalanced outcome, it is for the soul of our nation. Most of us had long since realized that we were not the white-hat-wearing, pure, good guys that we, especially white males, often imagine and sometimes portray ourselves to be. But even when the lies, racism, sexism, and heterosexism are laid bare and called out, there is no repentance, no changing paths, no choosing a better way. Trump and his party merely double down with the self-aggrandizing lies, deceit, and prejudice, with the result of an increasing chasm between rich and poor, whites and persons of color, men and women, Evangelical Neo-Conservatives and the rest of us. And that threatening caravan of Central American women, children, and a few beaten down men, still hundreds of miles away in Mexico will likely not reach the border before the 45 day deployment of soldiers runs out. Millions of dollars will have been spent for a grand charade, a parade if you will to our southern Border of thousands of troops whose time could better have been spent training or on leave before the holidays.

So now, we try to pick up the pieces, acknowledging our own complicity in this still evolving tragedy of modern America and seeking ways to create a healthier nation out of the current mess. The lies and blame games have to stop, but we may only be able to model the future that we hope to see. We will not have another chance to vote for two years, but in that time there is much that we can do.

This week, I've been reading another very recent book, a collection of essays by UU Religious Professionals edited by Mitra Rahnema, on behalf of the ARAOM Committee of the UU Ministers Association, entitled, *Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry*. This collection of essays by prominent Religious Professionals of Color in Unitarian Universalism provides many reminders of how far we have yet to go within our churches and association. I haven't always liked the programs or tactics being used in the effort to change Unitarian Universalism, but I certainly have known that we have problems in accepting and supporting members and leaders whose skin shade is darker than most of us pink or white Caucasian types. The essays in *Centering* tell the stories of many of my colleagues in this movement whose experience has been very different from my own. Several have been encouraged to take on leadership in the UUA before they were well prepared, and many have been forced out of positions in congregations after short tenures because neither they nor the congregations were ready for leadership by a person of color. I was saddened reading many of the stories, but I have come to admire these colleagues who have struggled with challenges I have not faced.

As I have thought about White Fragility, I have been drawn to consider the impact of changing generations around issues of race. For many of us now older folks, we thought that the battles of the 1950s, 60s and 70s had settled if not all, at least many of the problems with racism in our country. Jim Crow at least was conquered and equality was proclaimed as the new norm. Of course, the Confederate Rebel flags flown in the South and by many rednecks in the North were a visible sign of dissent from the agreed upon official balance of equality. When there was racial violence it was relatively easy to see the connection to what seemed to be a few small groups of Neo-Nazis, Aryan Nation members and other White Supremacists. It seemed for a long time that these groups comprised only a small fraction of the populace, problems but not significant enough to challenge the consensus of equality. Unfortunately it has now become all too clear that such groups were only the tip of the iceberg, that racist ideas had been passed on in far more families and groups so that new generations of racists had replaced those that we thought vanquished.

Further, the tendency to treat persons of color differently has never really gone away in this country. Many of us believed that the overt racism of our youth had at least been replaced by better hidden examples of covert racism. We wanted to believe that our society had really progressed from the battles half a lifetime ago. But new generations of persons of color have suffered as much from what we wanted to believe had become covert and far less prevalent forms of racism. In our White Fragility, we did not want to believe that as much damage was being done to younger generations, we did not want to see how bad the problems are.

Recent events have shown the lie to our comfortable imaginings. Even if some racism is better hidden, people are still being hurt, wounded physically and emotionally, and some are dying in a cause that should have been ended long ago, should never have arisen.

We cannot merely sit upon our hands imagining that we have done enough because we have a few black friends and a few black members of our mostly white congregation. Yes, you have had a black woman minister, and that is good to celebrate, but we have a very white majority here currently. We have only a small line in one of our flags to proclaim that Black Lives Matter. Many of our sister congregations have banners to proclaim that. What have we done lately to show that Black lives really do matter?

I know that in recent days we also need to speak out for student lives and Jewish lives and those displaced by fires and floods and Hurricanes. Every life matters, but certain lives are more at risk in our society, with Blacks most likely to die in Police shootings, or in gang violence. Many Latinx persons are also very much at risk in our society, but it continues to be Blacks who most often die a violent death at an early age.

What can we do to be more accepting? What can we do to bring real equality? What can we do to change our society? We can call out racism, sexism, and heterosexism in jokes that are being told. We can let others know when their remarks are showing racial or sexual bias. We can stop letting even minor comments go unremarked. We can make a greater effort to make sure that our words and actions make clear that we are committed to treating all persons with respect, justice and love. We cannot just live on our laurels, we need to show today that we respect and value all persons, but yes, especially persons of color. With all the ways that the President of our nation and too many in his regime and party have shown their racism, we need to counter that racism, sexism, and heterosexism with love and respect. We may have done great things to dismantle prejudice in the past, but we need to keep showing up today. When there are demonstrations about the shooting of blacks by police and vigilantes, we need to show up. And we need to send an even clearer message that Blacks and other persons of color are welcome here and will be respected and included and accepted. I need some volunteers to talk about new Banners and Messages to make it clear that we oppose racism, sexism, and homophobia!

I'm still not sure that I like the current UUA programs, but I do believe that we need to be more inviting to persons of color and to LGBTQQIAA, GF, PA and P persons, as well as persons from any religious background who practice acceptance of others. And it is time that we invited friends, relatives, and colleagues to join us, because we are going to need help if we are going to change Stockton and the World!

It is also time that we look more closely at our own behavior around race. Stockton is a very diverse community, but do we have friends who are persons of color? Do we listen to their stories and learn from their experiences of racism? If we are white, what have we done recently to break down racism or to support persons of color? Are we letting our friends and society know that we oppose racism even in its subtler quieter forms? Have we tried to cultivate friendships with those whose skin is a different shade than ours?

We live in a challenging time, not unlike the Civil Rights era. There are great disparities between the poor and those at the top of the wealth scale. Few if any in the middle or lower strata in society will ever reach the top which grows further away each year. Wealth has been the primary measure of success through most of American history, and it is even more so today. But the gap now is wider than ever before, and the means chosen to keep the poor in their places by too many of the wealthy is to portray modern life as a zero-sum game. If the wealthy keep everyone else fighting for the leftovers, those fighting are too distracted to see how the wealthy are getting even further ahead by cutting taxes and not paying a living wage, then leaving it to those in the middle to pay for what few social programs are left. Who benefits from racism, sexism, and heterosexism? Again it is the wealthy who keep those at lower levels distracted so that they do not see the thievery of those at the top. This is not balance, or justice, or equity, and it surely shows no compassion. This is another way the rich divide and conquer.

By voting for those who seek justice, calling out the corporations and individuals who are doing the worst harm, and demanding reform of the electoral system and the judicial system, perhaps we will be able to reclaim our nation and the ideals for which it used to stand from today's robber barons of industry and commerce. Another vehicle for change is education, and we must also reclaim the educational system from those who would turn it into another profit center by replacing public education with schools for the wealthy paid for by the rest of us. The educational system needs reform to adequately pay and protect teachers and to keep children safe while teaching them to succeed in today's world.

In reality, it is not a shortage of things we can do to bring change, but the great number and variety of things that need doing that trips us up and leaves us unsure where to start. In every area of society, there are things that need doing, and there is more than enough for each of us to keep busy, probably for the rest of our lives! We just need to start somewhere, anywhere, to start being the change that we wish to see!

So May it Be! Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!