

JUNE 23, 2015



Racial Justice Vision Survey

Preliminary report and findings



Introduction

From voting rights to mass imprisonment to police brutality and Black Lives Matter protests, racial justice issues in the United States have a new sense of urgency. Recognizing that countless leaders of all backgrounds have worked to advance racial justice over decades, the tragic events of the past year, even as recent as the mass shooting in Charleston, South Carolina the week this report was compiled, have kept racial justice in the forefronts of our hearts and minds. This urgency is bringing communities together across boundaries of race, faith, and geography in solidarity with movements as diverse as immigration, economic inequality, LGBTQ equity, and climate justice.

The goal of the Unitarian Universalist Association's Racial Justice Vision Survey is to help frame a shared vision for what Unitarian Universalists can do to advance racial justice, and for what the UUA can do to support that vision. The online survey was able to offer a large number of people the opportunity to add their voices to this vision in a short amount of time. The survey was live May 21-June 15, 2015, open to all UUs, and had 703 respondents (Appendix contains full text).

Process

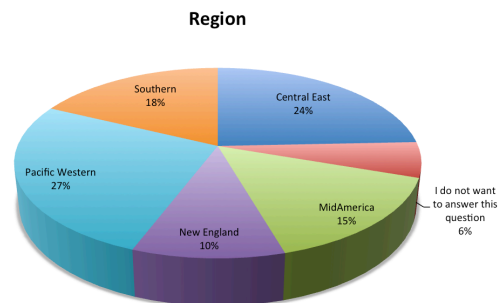
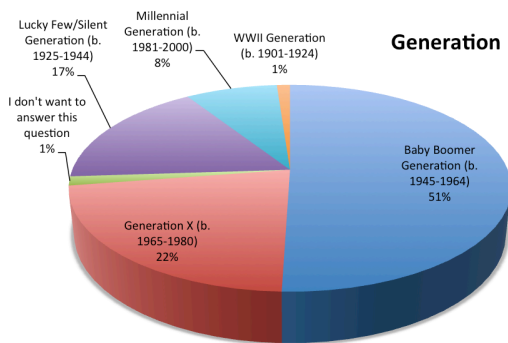
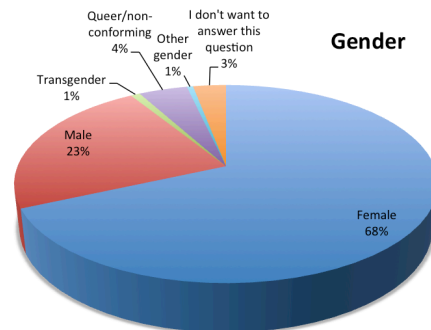
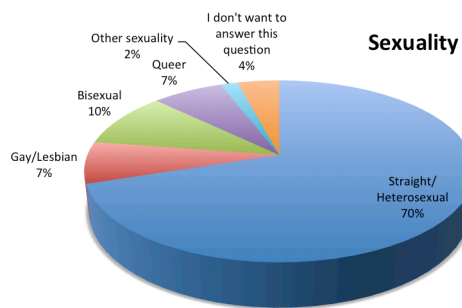
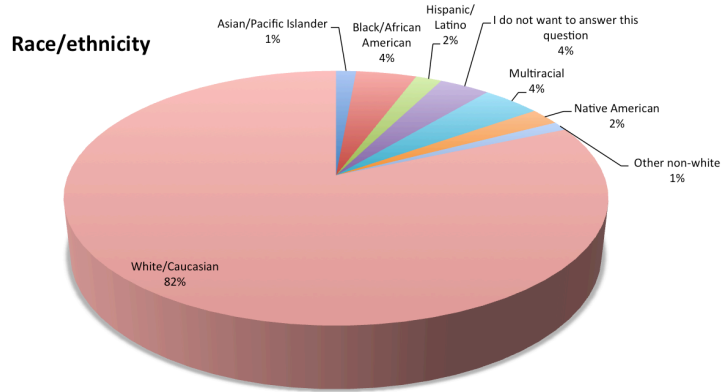
The survey was a joint project between the UUA Multicultural Growth and Witness Office and the Outreach Team, reflecting the timely and outward-looking focus of recent racial justice activities across the country. It was advertised through UUA social media and email lists, including district and region newsletters, with special invitations sent to groups such as religious professionals, groups of UUs of color, and leaders in congregations committed to multicultural community.

Summary

Respondents described an overwhelming desire to be involved with racial justice. They showed deep awareness of what it means to be good partners, recognizing that, since UUs rarely make up the communities that suffer the most at the hands of systemic racism, we must engage in racial justice work as an ally and follow the lead of the organizers, particularly organizers of color, who are closest to the issues. With so much activity going on right now in UU communities, there is also much to learn. This is a preliminary report, and a more detailed report will be released later this summer (figures may be revised through more detailed analysis). Percentages listed in this report are based on the total number of respondents who answered each question. For more information, contact socialjustice@uua.org.

Demographics

The total number of respondents was 703.



Results by Question

Question 1 – What is your vision?

A vast majority (90%) described a vision of active UU involvement with racial justice, with only a handful saying it is not an important cause. Respondents passionately and movingly described the role they hoped UUs would play in the struggle for racial justice in the coming years. A number of respondents even drew parallels with UU work on climate justice or LGBTQ equity, hoping we can raise our involvement with racial justice to that same pervasive level.

“I want us to be able to say, without qualification, ‘We answered the call.’ That may take many forms. There are so many things we can do. I want us to be identified with racial justice work as strongly as we are identified with the fight for marriage equality.”

- Survey Respondent

There is a solid understanding of the need to approach racial justice as good allies through partnership (raised by 27% of respondents), following the lead of organizers in communities of color suffering most from systemic racism. 10% also noted the inward/outward dual role of racial justice, saying that, while UUs are now being prompted by events in the world to re-engage with race issues, we cannot lose sight of our commitments to making our congregations and faith communities more multicultural.

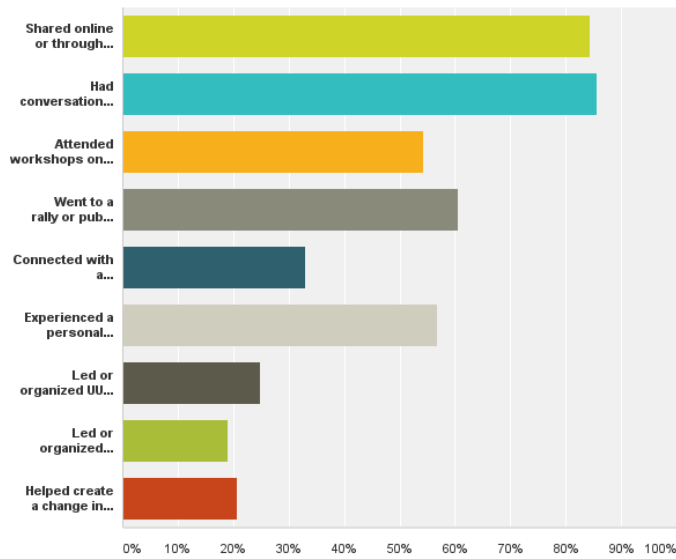
Other themes mentioned included the desire for UUs to be a strong religious or moral voice (5%), to focus on racial identity awareness and development, particularly for white UUs (10%), and for UUs to offer a safe space for discussions on race. A number of related issues were connected to racial justice (18% of respondents raised a related issue), ranging from policing, prisons and criminal sentencing to economic inequality, fair housing and education.

Question 2 – What do you hope we will avoid?

Similar to Question 1’s responses, the biggest concern raised by respondents was to make sure UUs act as supportive partners and allies with those who are leading the racial justice movement (about 40%), and avoiding pitfalls such as inappropriately seeking the spotlight or feeding the “white savior complex.” Nearly as many (37%) raised concerns about UUs’ lack of personal understanding and commitment around race and identity, ranging from ignoring perspectives of people color, to internalized racism, to inaction due to fear or complacency.

Other themes included a UU tendency to talk rather than act or get stuck in hopelessness (14%), or for white UUs to ignore or tokenize UUs of color in internal conversations (10%). Some highlighted the connection between race and economic inequality, and others warned against pitting one justice issue against another. Small numbers (<5%) named jumping to conclusions or using publicly alienating tactics as a worry.

Question 3 – What have you done in the past year?



Respondents have been active, with over 85% sharing online or having a conversation about racial justice. Many reported higher levels of activity, including leading events for other UUs (25%) and working to change local policies (21%). A majority say they have experienced a personal realization or transformation around racial justice (57%).

Other actions of respondents included volunteering with racial justice organizations, donating to related causes, individual learning

and writing, and shaping personal choices, such as the neighborhood chosen to live in.

Question 4 – How does racial justice connect to other issues?

A large majority (87%) affirmed that racial justice is connected to other justice issues. Some simply said “yes, they are all connected” while others gave a more nuanced explanation of the intersection of these issues, particularly those related to identity. A few respondents even described focusing on interconnected issues as central to a UU approach to social justice.

A significant number (35%) pointed to racial justice as the most important issue to focus on right now. In descending order, the most commonly mentioned other issues included economic inequality (17%), immigration and climate justice (both 6%), LGBTQ equity, reproductive justice, prison reform, and physical/mental ability.

Question 5 – What support do we need?

The most common response was to improve our awareness of race (21%), including understanding our individual and collective racial identities, learning about the history of UU engagement with race, and better focusing our resources on advocating for justice.

Matching the themes in Questions 1 and 2, respondents often called for partnership with other groups (16%) including interfaith groups, historically African American religious groups, community organizations and other UU groups. Some pointed to the need for UUs to have a public presence as supporters at rallies and events. A number also described needs within their congregations for trained facilitators and for making explicit commitments to multiculturalism.

About 10% upheld the importance of UUA leadership speaking out as a “prophetic voice,” and another 9% asked for curricula or educational materials from the UUA. Ministers were also asked to take the lead on this issue (7%), and a smaller group emphasized the need for clearer theology of anti-racism.

Question 6 – What spiritual practices sustain you?

Respondents had a variety of personal and group practices which gave them meaning and strength to engage with racial justice. Most frequent practices included meditation, reflection or prayer (27%), fellowship and small group connections within a congregation (27%), reading, storytelling or other art forms (20%) and group discussions (16%). Some described their racial justice advocacy or organizing work, including through multifaith organizations, as a spiritual practice (10%), while others named more physical practices like yoga and connection to the natural world (7.5%).

Conclusion

It is clear that Unitarian Universalists are ready to engage with racial justice, and in fact are already doing so. This survey shows how much is happening right now in UU congregations and groups, as well as through the actions of individual UUs. Respondents find connections between racial justice and a broad range of other issues, in many cases putting race at the center of a wider struggle for equality.

In addition, hundreds of respondents described a deep understanding of faithful partnership and the role that allies can play in social action, demonstrating critically important awareness for UU communities that are often majority white and have significant social, economic and educational advantages. Though this awareness is not universal, it does provide a strong foundation for moving forward. Listening to the racially diverse voices within our own faith communities will also be key for authentic and appropriate racial justice activism, and for integrating the external “movement moment” with internal UU efforts to become more multicultural. There is a need for greater support for those advocating for justice in their communities, particularly around effective routes of leadership and education.

A final theme woven into the responses is that we must approach racial justice from a religious perspective, emphasizing our unique contribution as a moral voice calling for racial justice in our communities. Through theological language, the prominent leadership of clergy members, or spiritually sustaining practices and opportunities, we must always ground our racial justice efforts in our identity as a *faith* movement.

In the next few months, the UUA will use the results of this survey to guide its planning for the coming year to help make the vision described in this survey a reality. Some of the resources requested in the survey are already being offered by the UUA, including support for creating multicultural congregations, connection with partner groups, some curricular materials, and public statements from UUA leaders. This survey prompts UUA leaders to reevaluate how these existing resources are publicized, revisit what gaps remain, and recommit time and resources to racial justice, especially in support of leaders and activists in their local communities. Visit uua.org/multiculturalism for more information.

Additionally, while the UUA has a unique role to play in supporting UU engagement with racial justice, this survey highlights the roles of other leaders and institutions as well. The UUA will share the results of this survey with other groups and organizations so that they may similarly use this information to inform their actions. Achieving the inspiring and vital vision for racial justice that this survey describes will require leadership at every level of our faith movement.

Appendix

FULL SURVEY TEXT

From voting rights to mass imprisonment to police brutality and Black Lives Matter protests, racial justice issues in the United States have a new sense of urgency. This urgency is bringing communities together across boundaries of race, faith, and geography in solidarity with movements as diverse as immigration, economic inequality, LGBTQ equity, and climate justice.

We invite Unitarian Universalists of all ages and backgrounds to share their hopes and dreams for the role that UUs can play in the coming years in advancing racial justice in the United States. Responses are anonymous.

This survey will help UUs describe a shared vision for how we can support racial justice in the United States in the next few years. Together we can help end systems of racism in our society and create a more just and compassionate world.

The survey will remain open through June 15, 2015. For more information, contact socialjustice@uua.org.

Please share your thoughts on how Unitarian Universalists can and should engage with racial justice.

1. In the next 2-3 years, what role do you hope Unitarian Universalists will play in the movement for racial justice in the United States?
2. What problems or pitfalls do you hope Unitarian Universalists can avoid in how we engage with racial justice for the next 2-3 years?
3. What have you done in the past year in support of racial justice? Check as many as apply.
 - a. Shared online or through social media about racial justice
 - b. Had conversations about racial justice in my congregation or other religious community
 - c. Attended workshops on racial justice
 - d. Went to a rally or public event for racial justice
 - e. Connected with a #blacklivesmatter local group or chapter
 - f. Experienced a personal realization or transformation around racial justice
 - g. Led or organized UU groups or events for racial justice
 - h. Led or organized community events for racial justice
 - i. Helped create a change in policies or practices in your community that advanced racial justice
 - j. Other (please specify):___

4. How do you see racial justice connecting with other justice movements? This could include climate justice, economic inequality, LGBTQ equity, immigration reform, reproductive justice, or other issues.
5. In your opinion, what needs to happen to support Unitarian Universalist engagement with racial justice (including support from congregations, the UUA, or other UU groups)?
6. What spiritual resources and practices help sustain you in your engagement with racial justice?
7. What other feelings, thoughts, hopes, dreams, fears or comments would you like to share about Unitarian Universalism and racial justice?

Please tell us a little about yourself. This will help us understand patterns in the wider vision for racial justice. All questions are optional.

8. Do you consider yourself Unitarian Universalist?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know
9. If you consider yourself Unitarian Universalist, how long have you been UU?
 - a. 0-5 years
 - b. 6-10 years
 - c. 11-20 years
 - d. 21+ years
 - e. All my life
10. How would you describe your race or ethnicity? Pick one or more options.
 - a. White/Caucasian
 - b. Hispanic/Latino
 - c. Black/African American
 - d. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - e. Native American
 - f. Multiracial
 - g. I do not want to answer this question
 - h. I describe my race or ethnicity as:____
11. How would you describe your gender? Pick one or more options.
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Cisgender
 - d. Transgender
 - e. Queer
 - f. Gender non-conforming
 - g. I don't want to answer this question
 - h. I describe my gender as:____

12. How would you describe your sexuality?
- a. Straight/heterosexual
 - b. Gay
 - c. Lesbian
 - d. Bisexual
 - e. Queer
 - f. I don't want to answer this question
 - g. I describe my sexuality as:____
13. What is your generation? Dates are approximate, please choose the option that feels most comfortable to you.
- a. WWII Generation (b. 1901-1924)
 - b. Lucky Few/Silent Generation (b. 1925-1944)
 - c. Baby Boomer Generation (b. 1945-1964)
 - d. Generation X (b.1965-1980)
 - e. Millennial Generation (b. 1981-2000)
 - f. Rising Generation (b. 2001-present)
14. Where do you live?
- a. Select state
 - b. Country (if not United States):____
15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your identity, background or UU involvement?
16. If you want to receive a summary of the results of this survey, or future emails about racial justice in the UUA, please enter your email below:____