

ARCHIVE OF BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY ANOUCEMENTS
PART 1 - NOVEMBER 2020 – OCTOBER 2021

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on behalf of the Racial Justice Team Planning Group



BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Book by Book – November 30, 2020

The Racial Justice Planning Group is eager to share with you, every two weeks or so, a book that will help us grow further into the intentionally pro-active, radically inclusive, anti-racism congregation to which we have committed.

Sunday evening, November 29, the classic, long-standing **news program “Sixty Minutes”** featured a segment on a sunken shipwreck found two years ago at the bottom of the Mobile River in Alabama. The ship, *Clotilda*, was the last known slave ship to have brought captured Africans to the United States in the year 1860. You can listen to the generationally-held stories of those Africans from their descendants at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/clotilda-slave-ship-alabama-60-minutes-2020-11-29/>

And, we have an even more direct connection through **our friend Dr. Harris Gibson**, who had visited Africatown as a young person. Africatown is the community, still in existence, that the freed slaves founded. Harris led a small group of Racial Justice Book Club participants in a discussion of *Barracoön* last year. You can imagine how enthralling and informative his observations are.

So, with these two very relevant, current, and close connections, we offer our first book *Barracoön*.

Here are parts of a GoodReads.com review:

In 1927, Zora Neale Hurston went to Plateau, Alabama, just outside Mobile, to interview eighty-six-year-old Cudjo Lewis. Of the millions of men, women, and children transported

from Africa to America as slaves, Cudjo was then the only person alive to tell the story of this integral part of the nation's history. Hurston was there to record Cudjo's firsthand account of the raid that led to his capture and bondage fifty years after the Atlantic slave trade was outlawed in the United States...Based on those interviews, featuring Cudjo's unique vernacular, and written from Hurston's perspective with the compassion and singular style that have made her one of the preeminent American authors of the twentieth-century, *Barracoon* masterfully illustrates the tragedy of slavery and of one life forever defined by it.

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Book by Book - January 7, 2021**

The Racial Justice Planning Group would like to periodically share with you some reading recommendations—books that will help us grow further into the intentionally proactive, radically inclusive, anti-racism congregation to which we have committed. This week we call attention to *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates. The book is only 162 pages and, according to the book jacket, “is a profound work that pivots from the biggest questions about American history and ideals to the most intimate concerns of a father for his son...” Coates deals with the question: “What is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden?” There is also a film interpretation of the book that is creative and unusual. Read the book first to get the full impact!

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Book by Book – February 4, 2021**

This month the Racial Justice Planning Group focuses on the work of Claudia Rankine, a Jamaican-American poet, playwright, and professor. A central focus in her work is addressing race in a way that allows all of us to stay in the room together. What is it to “act civil,” of whom is that demanded, and how does that permit, or not, a Black person to exist fully as a United States citizen? There are several ways to access her work that might fit your schedule: A book or two. Video short documentaries. A magazine article. A lecture on February 11 at 6 pm. Let us begin with the February 11, 2021, 6 p.m. online Beckwith Lecture at Tufts University. The invitation to attend says, “As everyday white supremacy becomes increasingly vocalized with no clear answers at hand, how best might we approach one another? Author and poet Claudia Rankine, without telling us what to do, urges us to begin the discussion that might open pathways through this divisive and stuck moment in American history.”

The October 2020 Atlantic magazine article, “Claudia Rankine’s Quest for Racial Dialogue,” by Ismail Muhammed, is a comparison and analysis of *Citizen* (2014) and *Just Us: An American Conversation* (2020). Muhammed writes, “She (Rankine) sets out to stage uncomfortable conversations with white people—strangers, friends, family—about how (or whether) they perceive their whiteness.” Rankine suggests there is a “we” of community that does not ignore what constitutes the “I.” And, yet, “Is understanding change?’ she ponders.

Winchester Unitarian Society's racial justice book club last year hosted a discussion of her prize-winning *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014), facilitated by Aba Taylor. Rankine invites readers, addressed as "you," into contemporary race relations, vignettes of increasingly frequent real-life aggressions—both seemingly slight and clearly profound. Her prose poetry is richly interspersed with images and artwork into a compact 166 pages.

Rankine and her husband, documentary photographer John Lucas, a white American, have collaborated on a series of video shorts entitled *Situation*. Layering spoken poetry and moving visual imagery, we can hear and see public spaces and individual Black lives—airplane passengers, Hurricane Katrina, "stop and frisk" laws. The couple calls the legacy "the afterlife of slavery." <http://claudiarankine.com/m/situations.html> The Racial Justice Planning Group invites you to continue building a pro-active, radically inclusive, multicultural anti-racism Beloved Community, the Winchester Unitarian Society--book by book!

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Our Transforming Journey – February 11, 2021**

The Racial Justice Team Planning Group has been meeting with WUS committees and we are grateful for the me, thoughtful attention, and meaningful sharing that has taken place. These meetings are one step of many going forward as, together, we work towards transforming our Beloved Community, the Winchester Unitarian Society, from a multicultural-aware congregation committed to racial justice to an intentionally pro-active, radically inclusive multicultural anti-racism congregation. Watch for our monthly book recommendations and other suggestions and reminders for how we can move forward, individually and collectively on this journey.

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Book by Book – March 4, 2021**

The Racial Justice Planning Committee will be sharing reading recommendations each month in the spirit of helping us grow further into the intentionally pro-active, radically inclusive, anti-racism congregation we aspire to be.

This month we highlight *Say I'm Dead, a Family Memoir of Race, Secrets, and Love* by E. Dolores Johnson. Ms. Johnson tells a multi-generational story of interracial relationships, racism, and her own search for her white roots. We chose this book because of the opportunity to meet her via the Network for Social Justice program on Wednesday, March 24 at 7:30 p.m.

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Book by Book – April 1, 2021**

The stark words, "I can't breathe," have become all too familiar in the context of law enforcement dealing with Black and brown bodies. Imani Perry chose to title her book, *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons*. She writes, "Feeling deep love and complete helplessness to protect the beloveds is a fact of Black life."

Perry, a professor of African-American studies at Princeton University, graduated from local Concord

Academy, received an undergraduate degree from Yale, and Ph.D. and J.D. from Harvard. Her compact book of personal experience, vulnerabilities, and admonition is peppered with Baldwin, DuBois, Shakespeare, Dickinson, Morrison, Emerson, Wells and more.

Love, pride, imagination paired with discipline, resilience are foundational themes. She teaches her sons not to hold up their hands in the “don’t shoot” mode but rather to raise their right fist in power. As Perry states to her two sons on the first page, “... to admit that you are people. Black boys. People. This fact, simple as it is, shouldn’t linger on the surface. It should penetrate.”

A reader will find passages of unflinching challenge--that deeply resonate with anyone guiding young people and reveal once again what we white parents never have to say to our own children. Yet, Perry encouragingly says, “...joy, even in slivers, shows up everywhere. Take it. And keep taking it.”

Breathe is the “UUA Reads” choice for 2021. This year, in the world of virtual meetings, we have the exciting opportunity to join three Tuesday evening discussions, beginning April 13, with a UU congregation in Austin, Texas. A different part of the country with new friends to meet! Explore yourself at: <https://www.uua.org/read/breathe>.

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Question by Question – April 8, 2021**

The Racial Justice Planning Team invites you to reflect on this question: **What messages, spoken and unspoken, did you get about race when you were growing up?**

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Quotation by Quotation – April 15, 2021**

“Believe in the possibility that we can strive to be antiracist from this day forward. Believe in the possibility that we can transform our societies to be anti-racist from this day forward.”

from Ibram X Kendi’s book *How to Be An Antiracist*

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Resource by Resource – April 22, 2021**

In 1989 Peggy McIntosh published her iconic article, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” She wrote, “I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious...” In this year, 2021, we invite you to read Jonathan Capehart’s opinion piece in the April 17th issue of The Washington Post, “Being Black in America Is Exhausting.” He writes, “Every Black person you

know goes through some form of mental calculus before they start their day.” Enter his world, the other side of the looking glass.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/jonathan-capehart/>

BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,

Book by Book – May 6, 2021

The Racial Justice Planning Group will be recommending a book the first week of each month that we think will expand your understanding of race and racial justice. This month we highlight *Waking Up White* by Debby Irving. Debby grew up in Winchester and has spoken here several times. Her story may not be yours, but this book is bound to offer new insights even if you are not new to the journey toward racial justice. In Debby’s own words: *Waking Up White* is the book I wish someone had handed me decades ago. My hope is that by sharing my sometimes cringe-worthy struggle to understand racism and racial tensions, I offer a fresh perspective on bias, stereotypes, manners, and tolerance. As I unpack my own long-held beliefs about colorblindness, being a good person, and wanting to help people of color, I reveal how each of these well-intentioned mindsets actually perpetuated my ill-conceived ideas about race.

BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,

Question by Question – May 13, 2021

The second week of each month the Racial Justice Planning Group offers a question.

At this time of the year with graduations and other milestones happening, we offer this from Debby Irving’s book *Waking Up White*:

"Make a list of all the factors that you believe contributed to your own achievements as a student. How do you think being a white person or a person of color influenced each of those factors?"

BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,

Resource by Resource - May 27, 2021

The fourth Thursday of each month the Racial Justice Team invites us to explore a resource together. This week we feature **Winfred Rembert**, Black American artist, who died March 31, 2021, in New Haven, Connecticut.

In 2014, St. Mary’s Church Peace and Justice Committee and the Winchester Multicultural Network (now Network for Social Justice, nfsj.org) screened a documentary of Rembert’s life, *All Me*. Perhaps you attended?

And, the May 10 New Yorker featured his art, painful life scenes hand tooled on leather and painted. In the accompanying article Rembert described his experience as a young man serving in a chain gang. His seven years of hard labor followed a lynching that he had survived. That attempted murder was in 1967. Yes, 1967.

In a poignant brief film we are able to learn firsthand of Rembert's trauma, resilience, creativity, and love. There are harsh scenes, and they are the reality of our nation's history. The video concludes with a memorial service honoring the unrecognized victims of lynchings.

Please go to <https://youtu.be/-2Q97pXZE2g>

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Quotation by Quotation – May 30, 2021**

The Racial Justice Planning Group offers the following quotation as a way to spark thinking and discussion of what it means to be anti-racist:

"The opposite of racist isn't 'not racist.' It is 'anti-racist'...One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities as an anti-racist. There is no in-between safe space of 'not racist.'" ~ Ibram Kendi from his book *How to be an Antiracist*.

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Question by Question – June 10, 2021**

What motivates you to read about the United States' history of racial injustice?

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Book by Book – June 3, 2021**

Once a month the Racial Justice Planning Group recommends a book as a way to expand our understanding of race and racial justice. Recently YWBoston offered a book list with this introduction: "crucial to our vision of creating more inclusive environment is a belief in making space to learn, to listen to one another, and to build community. Reading provides everyone the opportunity to do this while allowing quiet, introspective time to process and reflect."

With that in mind we recommend *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson as our June choice. It's an absorbing true story of how Stevenson, as a young lawyer, became dedicated to defending poor clients, the incarcerated, and those wrongly convicted. Stevenson founded the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama and reading his book which features one of his first clients, will open your eyes to Stevenson's view of the death penalty as a form of lynching.

On June 15 at 7:30 p.m. The Network for Social Justice is hosting a panel discussion on the book (or you can watch the movie) to mark Juneteenth, celebrated on June 19th each year to recognize the end of slavery.

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Quotation by Quotation – June 17, 2021**

"Our shared vulnerability and imperfection nurtures and sustains our capacity for compassion"

~Bryan Stevenson from his book *Just Mercy*

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Resource by Resource – July 1, 2021**

Each month the Racial Justice Planning Group suggests a resource that connects to the recommended book of the month.

Even if you haven't read Bryan Stevenson's book, *Just Mercy*, we suggest that you google and watch a conversation between Stevenson and the author of *Caste*, Isabel Wilkerson. And if you have time over the summer, take a look at the Netflix documentary *Trial 4*, about Sean Ellis. Ellis was charged as a teen in the 1993 killing of a Boston policeman and the series follows his efforts to prove his innocence while exposing police corruption and systemic racism.

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Book by Book – July 15, 2021**

In reframing racism within the concept of a caste system, Isabell Wilkerson in her book *Caste, The Origins of Our Discontents*, gives us a deep perspective for untangling our nation's history. Wilkerson writes: "As we go about our daily lives, caste is the wordless usher in a darkened theater, flashlight cast down in the aisles, guiding us to our assigned seats for a performance. The hierarchy of caste is not about feelings or morality. It is about power—which groups have it and which do not."

She links the caste systems of India, Nazi Germany, and the USA in ways that may be unexpected and lays out eight pillars of caste that form its foundations.

Is this a book we might discuss as a congregation?

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Question by Question – July 29, 2021**

This past year has found us spending much more time in our homes, often inspiring us to undertake repairs and renovations.

Your Racial Justice Team invites reflection on the following dilapidated house metaphor.

Isabell Wilkerson writes, there is a possibility that America is an old house with **“unaddressed ruptures and cracks that will not fix themselves, and we are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now.”** (Wilkerson, page 16, *Caste, The Origins of Our Discontents*)

Will we just put a bucket under a leak or together rebuild the roof?

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
Quotation by Quotation – August 26, 2021**

This week we return to author Isabell Wilkerson for a concluding quotation:

“In a world without caste, being male or female, light or dark, immigrant or native-born,

would have no bearing on what anyone was perceived as being capable of. In a world without caste, we would all be invested in the well-being of others in our species if only for our own survival, and recognize that we are in need of one another more than we have been led to believe. We would join forces with indigenous people around the world raising the alarm as fires rage and glaciers melt. We would see that, when others suffer, the collective human body is set back from the progression of our species.”

Wilkerson, page 388, *Caste, The Origins of Our Discontents*

May it be so.

BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY, Question by Question – September 2, 2021

During this past year, the Racial Justice Team has shared weekly resources under the heading “Building Beloved Community.” What does that phrase mean to you as an individual and as a valued member of the Winchester Unitarian Society?

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr, said, “We envision The Beloved Community where injustice ceases and love prevails.” (Please see www.thekingcenter.org for fuller exploration.)

From our Unitarian Universalist Association comes this definition: “Beloved Community happens when people of diverse racial, ethnic, educational, class, gender, abilities, sexual orientation background/identities come together in an interdependent relationship of love, mutual respect, and care that seeks to realize justice within the community and in the broader world.”

As you reflect on these statements, please know that we welcome your personal definitions and observations. How are we as a congregation doing? What more could we be doing to build Beloved Community? Send your comments on!

BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY, ACTION BY ACTION, September 16, 2021

Each year our Unitarian Universalist Association calls our congregations to focus on crucial issues of justice and equity. In 2021 the Actions of Immediate Witness have been The Covid-19 Pandemic; Stop Voter Suppression; Defend and Advocate with Transgender, Non-Binary, and Intersex Communities.

There is also an important 2021 Statement of Conscience: Undoing Systemic White Supremacy. Its opening reads:

“Seeking universal justice and equity, we call upon the Unitarian Universalist Association and Unitarian Universalist individuals and congregations/groups to actively engage in undoing systemic white supremacy in all of its manifestations...”

To read the full statement, please go to:

<https://www.uua.org/action/statements/undoing-systemic-white-supremacy>

Over the next weeks, your Racial Justice Team will share four specific actions we can consider together, as compassionate Winchester Unitarian Society “thinkers and doers.”

Please contact us with ideas and questions. Join us in this work. We will welcome you!

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
ACTION BY ACTION - September 23, 2021**

The UUA 2021 Statement of Conscience states, “As Unitarian Universalists, we decry the ways in which the intersectional impact of systemic white supremacy divides our human family by privileging some groups over others and thereby generating resistance to the common goal of universal equity and justice. Systemic white supremacy is a direct affront to every one of our principles.” We, the Winchester Unitarian Society, are a part of the UU community of congregations.

As your Racial Justice Team promised, we will share over the next few weeks the four suggested actions in support of the 2021 statement. Together we continue to move into action and in support of those already on the front lines. We hold ourselves accountable to sustain strong resistance to inequity.

Action 1: ENGAGE WITH THE MOVEMENT. “We can fortify this movement for justice by participating in and organizing social action to denounce injustices such as police brutality, theft of native lands, environmental racism, mass incarceration, cruel responses to immigration, ableism in all its forms which discriminates and harms disabled people (with variations of body and mind), fat discrimination, criminalization of poverty, restricted reproductive rights, transphobia, lack of health care and education, and more. We can join in action outlined in the GA 2020 Actions of Immediate Witness ([“Address 400 Years of White Supremacist Colonialism”](#) and [“Amen to Uprising: A Commitment and Call to Action”](#)). “

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
ACTION BY ACTION - September 30, 2021**

Your Racial Justice Team continues this week with the second of four action ideas supporting the UUA “Call to Prophetic Action: 2021 Statement of Conscience, **Undoing Systemic White Supremacy.**” (See <https://www.uua.org/action/statements/undoing-systemic-white-supremacy>.) Last week we posted Action 1: **Engage with the movement.**

Action 2: **Carry forward the recommended healing actions conveyed in “Widening the Circle of Concern.”** As with other complex, embedded social problems, undoing systemic white supremacy requires not only engaging in action beyond our denomination, but also internal work to overcome the ways in which it weaves itself into our group cultures, interpersonal relationships, and individual ingrained biases. Affirming the knowledge and vital guidance detailed in the UUA Commission on Institutional Change report, *Widening the Circle of Concern*, we are called to implement recommendations releasing ourselves from the limits of systemic white supremacy embedded in our structures and habits so we can live our shared values more fully and freely.

Action 2 is eminently timely and accessible! Bring your voice to **Widening the Circle of Concern: Workshop on Governance, Tuesday, October 19, from 7 to 8:30 p.m.** (virtual). We will be looking at our congregational structures of decision-making and leadership practices, how they function, and how they support the practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
ACTION BY ACTION October 7, 2021**

Your Racial Justice Team continues this week with the THIRD of four action ideas supporting the UUA
“Call to Prophetic Action: 2021 Statement of Conscience, **Undoing Systemic White Supremacy.**”
(See <https://www.uua.org/action/statements/undoing-systemic-white-supremacy>.)

Build relationships across boundaries of privilege and oppression. “When one group seeks help for a problem such as racism, another oppressed group that is a member of the dominant race may feel that the roots of their own suffering will not be addressed.”

As your action this week, acquaint yourself with one of these anti-racism groups: Black Lives Matter, Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU), Black Youth Project, Diverse and Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM), the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, the Movement for Black Lives, the NDN Collective (an Indigenous-led organization), the Poor People’s Campaign, and Standing Rock nation. UU’s must forge relationships beyond boundaries of power and privilege.

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
ACTION BY ACTION – October 14, 2021**

Your Racial Justice Team continues this week with the final of four action ideas supporting the UUA
“Call to Prophetic Action: 2021 Statement of Conscience, **Undoing Systemic White Supremacy.**”(See <https://www.uua.org/action/statements/undoing-systemic-white-supremacy>.)

Action 4: **Fulfill our UU role as a spiritual anchor to BIPOC UUs.** Our UU role as a spiritual anchor requires the financial and administrative support of spiritual healing systems within UU infrastructure and programming that serves BIPOC-only efforts. With the concept of reparations still in nation-wide discussion, we can model--with each social justice gesture, plan, or effort--how to consider, always, the singular healing needs of BIPOC UUs.

May our actions mirror our values.

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
BOOK BY BOOK – October 21, 2021**

Heather McGhee’s acclaimed book *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* invites the reader to join her exploration of the ways that racism has hurt white people, from the draining of public pools to avoid integrating them to the lending practices that led to thousands losing their homes and the subsequent economic downturn of 2008. But it’s not all bad news. McGhee tells hopeful stories about people coming together across race “This is the book I’ve

been waiting for,” says Ibram X Kendi, author of *How to Be an Antiracist*. “The Sum of Us can help us come together to build a nation for us all, with policies that benefit us all.”

**BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY,
QUESTION BY QUESTION – October, 28, 2021**

What are racial justice issues that come to mind in October and November (Native American Heritage Month)?