

PROPOSED CONGREGATIONAL STUDY/ACTION ISSUE

CSAI – 1 UNDOING INTERSECTIONAL WHITE SUPREMACY

1 **Issue:** Racism is fundamental to U.S. social systems. White supremacy culture operates economically,
2 institutionally, politically, and culturally, shaping everyone’s chances to live healthy, fulfilling lives. It is
3 also the nation’s most toxic export, shaping policies and practices that do profound harm to the Earth
4 and all living things.

5 **Grounding in Unitarian Universalism:** White supremacy culture shaped everything we consider norms,
6 which recent experience has pushed us to analyze. Sociologist Robert Bellah challenged us to make
7 “the interdependent web of all existence the first of your principles and not the last.” Decentering
8 whiteness calls us to decenter individual dignity for our collective liberation.

9 **Topics for Congregational Study:** White supremacy operates intersectionally. Beyond black and white
10 and interwoven with other forms of oppression, it is multiracial and intersects with issues of class and
11 income, gender, age, ethnicity, immigration status, sexual orientation, religion, ability, and more.

- 12 • How are people socialized into various overlapping supremacy systems, creating a white dominated
13 hetero patriarchy that serves the interests of US corporatism?
- 14 • How do different racial and economic strategies get applied to different racial groups, often
15 disguised in coded language that pretends to be colorblind while having racialized impacts?
- 16 • How can we, as UUs, build transformative relationships of trust and accountability across race lines?

17 Through reflection and action, courageous conversations should foster our abilities to de-center
18 whiteness and other “isms”. At the core we must equip UUs to work inside and outside our
19 congregations, building trust by following the leadership and direction of the most vulnerable in society.

20 **Possible Congregational/Regional Actions:**

- 21 • provide ongoing training and education in antiracism and anti oppression on a multi- and inter-
22 generational basis to all who wish to deepen their understanding of the impacts of intersectional
23 white supremacy.
- 24 • build local relationships with people of color and other oppressed people, inside and outside
25 our congregations, so that agendas and strategies for social justice efforts respond to the real
26 vulnerabilities they face.
- 27 • mobilize UUs to participate in community organizing that is guided by accountable partnerships.

28 Actions can include street protest, advocacy work, resource sharing, local, regional, and national
29 campaigns, letter-writing, community asset building, and more. The key is organizing with strategic
30 accountability while building sustainable communities of resistance. This work should happen in
31 the areas of environmental racism, mass incarceration and police brutality, reproductive freedom,
32 immigration, access to quality health and education systems, and more.

33 **Related Prior Social Witness Statements:** There are few social witness statements from the last ten
34 years that do not have implications regarding intersectional white supremacy. Here are some standouts:
35 Reaffirmation of Commitment to Racial Justice (2016), Support the Black Lives Matter movement (2015),
36 and Reproductive Justice, (2015). Robert Bellah’s 1998 Ware Lecture is another resource.

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CSAI – 2 DISMANTLING INTERSECTIONAL OPPRESSION

37 **Issue:** Systemic injustices intersect across environment, race, gender and all other forms of oppression.
38 Identifying the underlying mechanisms which enable systemic and intersecting injustices enables us to
39 mitigate their harm. Intersectional justice calls us to work together across oppressions and become a
40 movement of movements.

41 **Grounding in Unitarian Universalism:** Our faith calls us to witness for justice. We affirm respect for the
42 interdependent web of all existence. An unfortunate aspect of the interdependent web is intersectional
43 oppression. Greater awareness of intersectional oppressions makes our anti-racism, animal wellbeing,
44 environmental, economic, and other justice work much more effective. This work calls us to decenter
45 individualism for our collective liberation.

46 **Topics for Congregational Study:** Intersectional oppressions reinforce each other therefore a holistic
47 approach grounded in awareness is required to mitigate harm and expand justice. No one escapes
48 formative acculturation. This catches each of us in a web of oppression. By examining and acting to
49 undo this acculturation, we gain liberation and justice for all.

50 Some questions to consider:

- 51 1. What is intersectionality, and how has that definition evolved? What does it mean to approach
52 oppressions in an intersectional way?
- 53 2. How can understanding humans' perceived dominance over other species and nature inform how
54 humans oppress humans? What was the original oppression?
- 55 3. How are people socialized into various overlapping supremacy systems, creating a white
56 heterosexual patriarchy dominated culture that serves the interests of the powerful?
- 57 4. What are current illustrations of intersectionality, intersectional oppression, and intersectional justice
58 in your community?
- 59 5. What is our ethical obligation to individuals - individual humans, individual nonhuman animals, etc.?
60 Does individual suffering matter regardless of species?
- 61 6. How can we as UUs build transformative relationships of trust and accountability across race lines?
- 62 7. What human economic, social, cultural, and/or religious systems degrade or destroy the quality of
63 life experienced by all inhabitants of Earth?
- 64 8. Animals eating other animals is part of our evolution and has seemed normal and natural. If healthful
65 and ample plant based food is accessible and affordable by human animals, is it ethical to exploit
66 nonhuman animals for food?
- 67 9. Douglas Hofstadter in his book *I Am a Strange Loop* subscribes to the concept known as the
68 narrative self: the notion that the idea of the self is ultimately a hypothetical construct – a story our
69 brains spin which generates the illusion that there is a single, stable and unified locus of willing,
70 thinking and choosing which constitutes our "I." Hofstadter posits a scale based on the degree to
71 which an entity can generate stories of self which he calls soul. The scale is normalized to humans,
72 so humans are at 100% soul and mosquitos, with virtually no ability to create stories of self, have
73 perhaps 0.01% soul. How does this idea fit with the inherent worth and dignity of all beings?
- 74 10. How do different racial and economic strategies get applied to different racial groups, often
75 disguised in neutral-sounding yet coded language which pretend to be colorblind while actually
76 having racialized impacts?
- 77 11. Five years from now, what difference would you see in your community if a highly effective widely

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78 drawn coalition worked together for intersectional social justice? What existing groups might come
79 together to form the coalition?

80 Courageous conversations, reflection, and action can foster our abilities to decenter whiteness and
81 other positions of power and privilege. Working inside and outside our congregations, we can build
82 trust by following the leadership and direction of our most vulnerable neighbors.

83 ***Possible Congregational/Regional Actions:***

84 Actions can include street protest, advocacy work, resource sharing, local, regional, and national
85 campaigns, letter-writing, community asset building, and more. The key is organizing with strategic
86 accountability while building sustainable communities of resistance. Intersectional solutions should
87 be sought which emerge from the complex web of our interrelatedness, rather than from the fallacy
88 that justice is a zero-sum game. This work could happen in the areas of environmental racism, mass
89 incarceration and police brutality, reproductive freedom, immigration, access to quality health, food, and
90 education systems, animal wellbeing, and more. For example:

- 91 1. Provide ongoing training and education in antiracism and anti-oppression on a multi- and inter-
92 generational basis to all who wish to deepen their understanding of the impacts of intersectional
93 white supremacy and intersectional human supremacy.
- 94 2. Build local relationships with people of color and other oppressed people, inside and outside
95 our congregations, so that agendas and strategies for social justice efforts respond to the real
96 vulnerabilities they face.
- 97 3. Educate congregations and regions about intersectional justice, including the historically
98 disproportionate impacts of pollution and climate change on people of color, economically
99 disenfranchised communities, and nonhuman species.
- 100 4. Mobilize UUs to participate in community organizing that is guided by accountable partnerships.
- 101 5. Work to understand and dismantle white supremacy culture in the environmental movement and
102 other organizations charged with protecting the web of life.
- 103 6. Study the overlapping impacts of global climate change and white supremacy in current climate
104 disasters and governmental response and rebuilding, and the impacts of nonhuman individuals in
105 those communities
- 106 7. Learn about the economic, environmental, cultural, and spiritual impacts of separating first nations
107 peoples from their traditional lands.
- 108 8. Host a compassionate potluck to invite discussion about the challenges and celebrations of our
109 relationships with other species, the humans who labor to provide our food, and the economic and
110 social forces that shape those processes.