White Counter Narrative Avatar

- John E. Pickett
- cisgender man
- heterosexual

Greetings, Commissioners,

I am writing in response to the call for testimony about member experiences with racism.

I am copying Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, as I have been in contact with her regarding my dismay at the direction our beloved Association is heading by adopting dangerous authoritarian ideas like critical race theory/critical race theology, rejecting logic, and promoting dangerous and disrespectful persons to leadership.

By way of introduction, I am a fourth-generation Unitarian, my family having begun in the faith at the church served by Rev. William Ellery Channing.

I am a retired county executive, councilman (during which time I passed an ordinance to rename a local road "Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard"), professor, former congregational president, and district leader. I have served in various other roles, including religious education chair and chair of the Social Action Committee.

During the sixties and seventies, I marched for racial justice and the student anti-war movement, risking jail time (as well as life and limb!) to speak up for my fellow Americans. I was a supporter of the Black Affairs Council and wrote a strong letter of disapproval to the moderator regarding the failure of leadership after the Black Empowerment Controversy.

I am proud to say that things have improved considerably, both in the world and within Unitarian Universalism. In my own life, I have seen many engineers, police officers, and elected officials who were not Caucasian males (a big change!), some of whom were even openly homosexual.

Currently, my primary physician, physical therapist, and home health aide are all Black. My daughter is a pilot, breaking out of traditional jobs for her gender. I have personally hired both men and women of color in various subordinate positions.

And I worked tirelessly to call our first openly gay director of religious education. Of course, more could be done. However, I believe it would be a great shame to destroy the excellent work so many have produced, as it seems your approach is insistent on doing.

Another troubling idea being pushed by the Commission is "cultural misappropriation." Within our congregation, we've happily celebrated Day of the Dead and Juneteenth, and we regularly sing African-American Spirituals despite having no Black members in our choir (though I should add, we have *two* Black people in the congregation)! These should be seen as great strides toward learning and reconciliation, not demonized and barred by illiberal, fascist edicts from the UUA.

Am I not allowed to eat bagels because I have no Jewish ancestors? Can I not listen to Chopin if I am not Polish? Should we bar our African-Americans from attending our Fourth of July services?

The current direction of the UUA and groups like the Commission exacerbates divisions when we should be minimizing differences and focusing on unity. My minority friends and many who are black and gay want to be accepted as people, not seen as part of groups, or victims.

Reasonable people of color will not join a faith that stereotypes them with identity politics. Caucasians will not join a church where they are called "White Supremacists" like the KKK or Skinheads, and many will decide to leave. If that happens, the Association will collapse financially.

We must get our faith back in line with the principles of liberalism, democracy, and critical thought.

Definitions

- Racial Equity/Justice
  The systemic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone.
  —Race Forward

- Inclusion
  Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.
  —OpenSource Leadership Strategies

- Co-laborer
  We understand white identity to be an imposition on all Europeans stemming from traditionally land-owning, wealthy culture groups within Europe who forcefully homogenized other Europeans through warfare and socio-economic and religious subjugation.

  We also understand that the imposition and institutionalization of white-supremacist, patriarchal, colonialist capitalism, which dictates and celebrates excess and resource hoarding, has led us to ecocidal behavior and the risk of our own species extinctions following the mass extinction already under way.

  Therefore, we recognize the efforts by European-allied folks and white-presenting people who understand that they must dismantle the white supremacist ideological system both to live their values and ensure their own co-survival and co-liberation with both the planet and their fellow inhabitants.

  It is worth mentioning the reality that Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color have been most adversely affected by white-supremacist ideology, conquest, slavery, settler colonialism, and institutional racism. By pointing to the need for empathy we are in no way endorsing the centering of people with white identity in the struggle for liberation for all.

- Ally
  Someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege and work in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice. Allies understand that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways. Allies are not self-declared; they are in relationship with and accountable to oppressed people.
  —OpenSource Leadership Strategies

- Anti-Blackness
  Anti-Blackness is not simply the racist actions of a white man with a grudge nor is it only a structure of racist discrimination—anti-blackness is the paradigm that binds blackness and death together so much so that one cannot think of one without the other. When one thinks of dying, we think of "fading to black"—when we think of Death (Grim Reaper, Devil, Angel of Death), we think of a being cloaked in blackness. And in the popular imagination, when we think of black people (children, women, men), a dead body will come to mind.
  —Nicholas Brady

  The opposite of the constructed white/black binary.

  Blackness is redefined as corrupt, degenerate, evil, criminal, and ultimately associated with death.

  The identification of Black people and "Black" as "other," and "less than" the identity of whiteness.

  Black people are redefined as slaveable objects for the use, gratification, and power of white males, primarily; white identified people in general; and by extension anyone within white dominated systems.

  This extends to language that assigns negative associations to darkness and positive associations with lightness.

- Colonization
  A process involving the invasion, dispossession, and subjugation of a people. The invasion need not be military; it can begin—or continue—as a geographical intrusion in the form of agricultural, urban, or industrial encroachments. The result is the dispossession of vast amounts of land from the original inhabitants.
  This is often legalized after the fact.
  —*Colonization and Racism (film by Emma LaRocque)*

  Beyond merely a definition of conquest, colonialism is understood to have different forms and to have created extensive, generational harm.

  Colonialism often begins with religious incursion, with a subtext of religious mandate, in which Indigenous beliefs are suppressed by missionaries from the conquering culture, and continues with economic oppression and dispossession of cultural tradition and values through aggressive trade backed by military force, overt conquest, and forced education in the dominant language and educational structure.

The effects of colonialism are far reaching. Within church life, it is likely to affect how we think about and use music, do religious education, choose readings, sources, architectural styles, and where and how we worship, with all of these aspects favoring the dominant culture.

The cultural dominance of the colonizing group punishes non-conformity; tokenizes and advances subjugated conformers; willfully ignores Indigenous history while codifying a narrative of events that reframes the intent, effect, and interactions of the colonizers; and cultivates cultural myths, media, and art that reinforce these beliefs.

We also see settler colonialism as the basis of a gentrification mentality in that the goal of settler colonialism is to displace and replace Indigenous groups.

Many have also explored the ways in which colonization also affects many Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color living within the countries of their colonizers.

For example, Black Panther Party political education points out that African diasporic people in the Americas are not a minority but rather members of a colonized majority from Africa, forcibly migrated over centuries to build the foundational wealth of the settler populace.

- Microaggression
  Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Those who inflict racial microaggressions are often unaware that they have done anything to harm another person. [Note: Many participants in the Collaboratory said that what we call "micro-aggressions" are in fact just aggressions because of the damage done.]
  –D. W. Sue et al., "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life"

- Indigeneity
  Indigenous populations are composed of the existing descendants of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them by conquest, settlement, or other means and reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic, and cultural customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form part.
  —United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations

- Diversity Diversion
  Diversity can be a diversion. We must go beyond diversity to real parity, where inclusion of people of color on corporate boards, in senior leadership roles, advertising, and professional services can be quantified and measured.
  —Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., "Diversity Is a Diversion"

- Institutional Racism
  The ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites, and oppression and disadvantage for people of

color.
—Maggie Potapchuk, et al., "Flipping the Script"

- Internalized Racism
Internalized racism is the situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and ideologies that undergird the dominating group's power.
—Donna Bivens, "Internalized Racism"

[Note: Collaboratory participants saw additional manifestations in Unitarian Universalism. Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color found themselves being judged by a harsher standard of excellence than their white peers and overworking to "prove" themselves; disparaging, downplaying, and suppressing their own complexities of identity and experience as people of color; not addressing microaggressions and repressing their responses; limiting their aspirations to fit expectations; avoiding taking up space for themselves; and feeling pressure to compete with other Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.]

- Structural Racism
"A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. The structural racism lens allows us to see that, as a society, we more or less take for granted a context of white leadership, dominance, and privilege. It has come about as a result of the way that historically accumulated white privilege, national values, and contemporary culture have interacted so as to preserve the gaps between white [people in the United States and people in the United States] of color."
—Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change

[Note: Collaboratory participants saw additional manifestations in Unitarian Universalism: the habit of congregations of seeking white heteronormative ("bearded") leadership; access to the path of ministry only for those who can afford to go to seminary or move around for a job; norms about who is allowed to remain in the space and who is pushed out after conflicts in congregations and groups; lack of transparency about our congregational and institutional processes; and the locations of our churches in well-to-do, white-majority areas.]

- Racism
Individual, cultural, institutional, and systemic ways by which differential consequences are created for different racial groups. The group historically or currently defined as white is being advantaged, and groups historically or currently defined as non-white (African, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, etc.) are being disadvantaged.
—Racial Equity Tools

- Whiteness/White Identity
A set of physical characteristics and experiences generally associated with being a member of the white race. Due to worldwide anti-Blackness, primarily as a result of the imposition of white supremacist ideology through conquest, settler colonialism, and neo-colonialism, whiteness is seen by many cultures touched by this process as having

inherent privileges over those who are considered "darker skinned."

- White Privilege
I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.
—Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege"

- White Supremacy
The belief that the white race is better than all other races and should have control over all other races.
—Merriam-Webster Dictionary

- White Fragility
A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium.
—Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility"

[Note: Collaboratory participants saw additional manifestations in Unitarian Universalism, such as the system-wide "offense" taken at the language of "white supremacy" and concern that discussing white supremacy associates Unitarian Universalists with white nationalist groups, and the lack of willingness to explore the context in which these words are being used by the people who have needed to develop them as a matter of naming their lived truths.]

- Erasure
Minimizing, obscuring, and denying definition and visibility to identities, cultures, and ideologies that fall outside the "norm" of the dominant culture.
Erasure may manifest in groups and individuals being treated as not part of communities of color.

- Unconscious/Implicit/Hidden Bias
Negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to trump individuals' stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is often used to measure implicit biases with regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other topics.
—Cheryl Staats, "State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review"

- Color-blindness/Racial Neutrality
The racial ideology that posits the best way to end discrimination is by treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity… Colorblindness alone is not sufficient to heal racial wounds on a national or

personal level. It is only a half-measure that in the end operates as a form of racism.
—Monnica T. Williams, "Colorblind Ideology Is a Form of Racism"

- Criminalization
Criminalization means, quite literally, to make an activity illegal or to treat someone as a criminal. In the context of civil rights and racial justice, researchers, advocates, and justice system leaders have described both the criminalization of poverty and the criminalization of people of color as interactive dynamics that perpetuate negative societal stereotypes and perceptions such that being Black, or being poor, is itself viewed as criminal. Criminalization is at the root of the simultaneous and sustained over-policing of targeted individuals and communities and under-policing of others, as well as the disparate outcomes that result from that policing, such as harassment, expulsion from school, use of force, asset forfeiture, questionable searches and seizures, fines, detention, and incarceration.
—YWCA, "Backgrounder: What Are Criminalization and Racial Profiling?"

- Respectability Politics
Harvard professor Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham first coined the term "politics of respectability" to describe the work of the Women's Convention of the Black Baptist Church during the Progressive Era. She specifically referred to African Americans' promotion of temperance, cleanliness of person and property, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity. It entailed "reform of individual behavior as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform." Respectability had two audiences: African Americans, who were encouraged to be respectable, and white people, who needed to be shown that African Americans could be respectable.
—Paisley Jane Harris, "Gatekeeping and Remaking"

- Targeted Universalism
An approach that supports the needs of the particular group while reminding us that we are all part of the same social fabric. Targeted Universalism rejects a blanket universal that is likely to be indifferent to the reality that different groups are situated differently relative to the institutions and resources of society. Targeting within Universalism means identifying a problem, particularly one suffered by marginalized people, proposing a solution, and then broadening its scope to cover as many people as possible.
—john a. powell, Stephen Menendian, and Jason Reece, "The Importance of Targeted Universalism"

- Intersectionality
"A lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts."
—Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, in "She Coined the Term 'Intersectionality' Over 30 Years Ago. Here's What It Means to Her Today" by Katy Steinmetz, *Time*

- Black/POCI
Political terms of solidarity that include people of the African diaspora, Indigenous people, First Nations people, other formerly colonized victims of white supremacy/

domination, and non-European people outside the paradigm of whiteness.

- Horizontal Violence
When oppressed persons turn on those in their own lives (usually other oppressed persons) in frustration for not being able to effect change against more powerful targets. The term was coined by Frantz Fanon and used by Paulo Freire in writing about the impact of colonization on those colonized.
—Ashwini Tambe, "Has Trump's Presidency Triggered the Movement Against Sexual Harassment?"

- Predatory Behavior
Ways in which the most privileged are conditioned and encouraged to police and harm marginalized groups. (For example, "boys will be boys.")

[Note: Collaboratory participants saw manifestations in Unitarian Universalism such as predatory behavior passed down generationally through cultural values around "manifest destiny," "might makes right," "white man's burden," protecting "white civilization, "white womanhood," and New England, Protestant-style individualism. Predatory behavior also manifests in bullying, work and conflict avoidance, financial malfeasance, and sexual predatory behavior.]