

Essay Title: Why Do We Need A Dialog on Race & Ethnicity? **Audio Essay Series:** Disc 1, Track 16

Author: Paula Cole Jones

Date of Release: June 23, 2005

DOES YOUR CONGREGATION HAVE A VISION of being more diverse racially and ethnically or of being more effective in a multicultural world? Are you seeing an increase in the diversity of the children in your Religious Education programs? If so, members of your congregation will benefit from a deeper examination of how race has shaped their lives and the society in which they live. Creating A Dialogue On Race & Ethnicity is a way to get people talking.

Toni Morrison says in her book, *Playing In The Dark*, "...in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled... discourse. The habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture." People have to go against the current to bring matters of race into public discourse. Even if a person were interested in talking about race, the subject is likely to be met with ambivalence or avoidance by others. The result is an ongoing silence. As the silence is broken, we can confront social injustice and change systems and practices that advantage dominant groups and marginalize others. It takes holding on to a vision of a better way for us to live together to prompt us to take off the blinders so that together we can change our congregations and society.

Unitarian Universalist theologian, Rev. Rebecca Parker tells a compelling story about her awakening to the impact that race has had in her life. Her essay is entitled, "A Struggle to Inhabit My Country," and can be found in the book *Soul Work*. She says, "...the real world that I was born into included richly diverse cultures and communities. ...By the time I came of age, neighborhood and church, economic patterns, cultural symbolism, theological doctrines, and public education had narrowed my awareness of the country I lived in to the point of ignorance. The Chinese, African, Latin/Latina, Japanese, and First Nations peoples had largely disappeared from my consciousness."

Everyone has a story about race. Each of us has learned how to make meaning of race. Each person can find their voice through their own story. Listening to others' stories helps to build appreciation and empathy for similarities and differences in experiences and ultimately strengthens the community.

There is likely to be a group of people in your congregation who are interested in participating in A Dialogue On Race & Ethnicity. Consider establishing a monthly gathering, where members of the congregation get together to expand their understanding of how to help our congregations become more effective in a multicultural world. There are an unlimited number of resources available for you to use including videos, books, articles, guest speakers, workshops, and consultants. Some congregations have

Continued

Page 2 / *Why Do We Need a Dialog on Race & Ethnicity?*

engaged in a five-week discussion of the book, *Soul Work*, edited by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones, featuring Unitarian Universalist ministers in dialogue about anti-racist theology. Some have viewed the three part PBS video series, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*. For more resources visit the UUA website and look for Congregational Services.

Whichever way you choose to begin, create a safe space where all are welcome at the table. Let's talk about race until it no longer has the power to separate us. Plant the seeds and see what grows.

This Audio Essay series was created by the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, for the purpose of supporting its valued lay leaders. Copying and sharing these essay texts, downloadable audio files, and the companion LayLeader Drive Time Essays compact disc is welcomed and encouraged. • Comments or suggestions? We welcome your ideas about this Audio Essay series and your lay leader questions. Please send them to Don Skinner, the editor of InterConnections, a resource for lay leaders. Email: dskinner@uua.org

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108 617.742.2100 uua.org