

Why am I passionate about supporting the Black Lives Matter Movement?

Respectfully, and in Faith, Sara Gondwe, sarajayn@live.com

Well, because I'm UU, of course. Does that seem surprising to you? It shouldn't be if you know Unitarian Universalists have been involved in the civil rights of others since slavery days. We were outspoken abolitionists during the 19th Century and participated in the Underground Railroad. During the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th Century we joined in protest marches, sit-ins, boycotts and UU ministers preached from the pulpit about the injustice of racial discrimination, calling on our consciences to act. Did we act alone? No. Our UU Faith beckoned us to do the right thing.

Unitarians have given their lives fighting for justice. We were Freedom Fighters. During voter registration in the South UU ministers and other UU's came to Alabama to help register African Americans who were being refused precious voting rights. Viola Liuzzo and James Reeb were both murdered fighting for what they believed in and in what their Unitarian Faith called them to do.

When Dr. King called concerned citizens to march to Selma -- we were there. We were beaten. We were jailed. We were determined to be major players in the Civil Rights Movement of the 50's and 60's. Our Unitarian Universalist faith urged us on to do what is right -- to make sure ALL people are treated with dignity and respect. How can we sit by idly and watch the basic human rights we take for granted, denied to others simply because of their skin color or sexual identity?

Fast forward to 2013. Personal prejudice and institutional racism continue to exist. Unarmed Black youth are being shot down by police, women of color are mysteriously dying in police custody. Mass incarceration is painfully evident. Statistics continue to support the unequal treatment of people of color in all aspects of society. Hundreds of hate groups are actively spewing hatred and condemnation. What if this was one of our children? They ARE in our family of Unitarian Universalists. We must fight for their rights and stop this carnage and endless human suffering.

The Black Lives Matter Movement is an attempt to do just that. Yes, all lives matter. But our government and society is shouting out to us that Black lives don't matter. We have thousands of people of color who believe in their UU faith just as you and I do. I cannot look them in the eye and welcome them into our faith if I am content to do nothing. My UU faith commands that I act.

Kate Fraleigh asked a thought-provoking question. What were you doing when you were 6 years of age? Travel back to Mississippi and watch 6 year old Ruby Bridges being escorted by U.S. Marshals to an all white school due to implementation of our first desegregation laws. Lines of angry parents lined up, spitting at her and yelling racial slurs. Not for just one day but every day she went to school.

What are we doing now, in 2016 when voter suppression again is happening while we just walk in and vote without a problem? What are we doing now as we watch police brutality play out on our TV screens while our children get a smile and pat on the

back? What are we doing now as we watch a presidential candidate strut his racist attitudes and actions while thousands of fans are encouraged to follow his lead?

Enough. I am proud to be a Unitarian Universalist only if my faith continues to call us to act. Thank you, UUA for taking a stand in supporting the Black Lives Matter Movement at General Assembly. Thank you for calling out to our UU congregations to support the Movement. Thank you for believing in the dignity and respect of ALL people. I won't let you down. What about you?