

UUJEC News & Views: Spring 2023

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Upcoming Web Seminars: Join us on 2nd & 4th April Thursdays!

Thurs., April 13: Changing Narratives about Growing Food

The soil that we need to grow food and fiber is in more danger than people realize! The steady degradation of soil worldwide is almost invisible due to widespread practices of tillage that we now understand makes the life of the microbes that support plants very miserable. Who knew? Fortunately renewal and resilience is possible, necessary, and urgently needed. This discussion will focus on action steps everyone can take immediately to work the levers of change.

Dr. Eells works from the prairie pothole region of north central Iowa, and partners closely with her tenant to care for the family farmland. She has operated E Resources Group, LLC since 1997 and led the movement to reach women farmland owners with conservation information across the nation after obtaining her Ph.D. in 2008 from Iowa State University. In 2021, Eells won Conservation Professional of the Year from the International Soil and Water Conservation Society, Conservationist of the Year from the National Professional Organization of Women in NRCS, and Iowa Woman Conservationist from the Conservation Districts of Iowa and the NRCS Federal Women's Program in Iowa.



Thurs., April 27: Reducing Multigenerational Poverty through Sentencing Reform

The relationship between incarceration and poverty is circular, cyclical, and symbiotic – poverty causes of incarceration, and incarceration causes poverty. Shortly after culture shifting civil rights victories in the 1960s, states began enacting draconian sentencing laws that required judges to sentence children and adults to longer periods of incarceration. This coincided with policies that divested money and public resources from the same communities that were the targets of criminalization. For the past half century, these harsh sentencing laws have

been the primary driver of mass incarceration. As a result, generations of families with criminal legal system involvement have been damned to multigenerational poverty. This is most profound in low-income communities, particularly low-income Black and brown communities.

Jared will discuss how sentencing laws operate, how so-called tough on crime sentencing paradigms are counter productive to community safety, and how sentencing structures can be reformed in order to improve community safety and ensure more people can live with their families in their communities.



Jared Trujillo (he/him) serves as Senior Policy Counsel at the New York Civil Liberties Union (ACLU of NY), where he focuses on criminal and juvenile legal system issues. Jared drafts legislation, reviews and

suggests amendments to administrative regulations, prepares community members to lobby, appears in media, and advocates for policy change at state, local and federal levels. He has worked on successful campaigns, including a campaign to limit the use of long-term solitary confinement in New York, the repeal of a discriminatory statute colloquially called the "Walking While Trans Ban," parole reform, and criminal record relief for survivors of human trafficking. Jared's work has appeared in *The Advocate*, the *CUNY Law Review*, the *New York Daily News*, and other outlets. His commentary is featured in the *New York Times*, *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver*, and numerous other media outlets. Jared is on the board of the New York State Defender Association, and a steering committee member of Decrim NY.

Jared is an Adjunct Professor at CUNY Law School, where he teaches Constitutional Law, Critical Race Theory, and Decriminalizing Queerness. Prior to his current roles, Jared was the President of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (UAW Local 2325), and he served as a public defender and juvenile rights attorney at the Legal Aid Society NYC. While in college, Jared interned for the ACLU of Iowa, focusing on disparities in drug sentencing.

Sick Days & Buybacks on the Rails

Since the Norfolk Southern derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, in early February, we have noted that freight railroad workers are getting a few paid sick days, one railroad company at a time. As we go to press, the most recent is BNSF—given Warren Buffett's friendly avuncular image, one would have expected BNSF to be one of the early organizations to provide this basic benefit, but (1) he is famous for not interfering with Berkshire-Hathaway's purchased companies and (2), probably more to the point, he remains a capitalist: he has recently been criticized for defending stock buybacks, which have proliferated since the mid 1980s, when an SEC rule gave corporate executives protection from accusations of stock-price manipulation. In 2020, a *Harvard Business Review* [article](#) included the following:

Buybacks' drain on corporate treasuries has been massive. The 465 companies in the S&P 500 Index in January 2019 that were publicly listed between 2009 and 2018 spent, over that decade, \$4.3 trillion on buybacks, equal to 52% of net income, and another \$3.3 trillion on dividends, an additional 39% of net income. In 2018 alone, even with after-tax profits at record levels because of the Republican tax cuts, buybacks by S&P 500 companies reached an astounding 68% of net income, with dividends absorbing another 41%.

And concern has been expressed about windfall corporate profits during the pandemic, when so many employees were struggling with layoffs or dangerous working conditions.

Senator Bernie Sanders had introduced legislation for a corporate windfall tax (95% of excess profits) as a temporary emergency measure. The Ending Corporate Greed Act would raise an estimated \$400 billion in one year from 30 of the largest corporations alone and would apply only in 2022, 2023, and 2024.

Web Weaving

We are updating our Web site! It has been a long time since we did a revision, and we are testing new ground with a modern site that includes a (maybe not so modern, but interactive) forum where we can share some of what have been e-mail discussions among our board members and a few intrepid task-force members. We have four task forces—Green New Deal/Environmental Justice, Healthcare, Military Expense, and Reparations—and each has a forum for discussion.

Anyone can read our fora; all are welcome to log in (with human approval; no bots allowed!) to "speak up" in forum discussions. You can take a peek at our

"soft launch" at <https://uujec.net>; we invite you to help us with informal user testing by checking it out and sending your thoughts, pro or con, to uujec@uujec.org. Once we have finalized the new site, and have moved across all the important materials on our current site, we will move the new site to the .org domain,—so don't change all your bookmarks, just maybe add our new site for now.

We Need the WATER Act

As this issue goes to press, World Water Day is around the corner. The People's Water Project reports that Rep. Watson Coleman, Rep. Khanna, and Sen. Sanders will soon reintroduce the WATER Act to provide a permanent source of funding for water systems, wastewater systems, household wells, septic, and school water infrastructure. Here are just a few of the key things this legislation will do:

- 💧 Dedicate \$35 billion per year to repair drinking water and sewage systems
- 💰 Help stop sewage overflows and fund infrastructure improvements
- 👷 Create almost 1 million jobs

UUJEC joins allies across the movement to support the WATER Act. We encourage you to read more and to advocate for clean, safe and affordable water. More information may be found here: [\[Link\]](#)

Spring Holidays for Justice

Spring into spring. For the year 2023, the season has its official start in March. The list of spring events for March includes the Hindu celebration of Holi, the Jewish celebration of Purim, and the Muslim celebration of Ramadan. The theme of liberation is important. International Women's Day (March 8th) is receiving increased attention in many congregations.

April is the month for Passover, Easter, and Earth Day. On April 4th, many Unitarian Universalists remember the murder of Martin Luther King. Dr. King died in Memphis while helping to organize sanitation workers. During recent months, there has been a resurgence of labor union organizing and religious groups are involved. UUJEC is active in working with the AFL-CIO and with such labor organizations as Coalition of Immokalee Workers.



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Spring Holidays for Justice

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May is Older Americans Month, and elders are receiving increased recognition in economic-justice organizing. Senior citizens are organizing in defense of Medicare and Social Security, and because seniors are on the front lines for the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. After Memorial Day, many congregations and communities prepare for hot weather. Heat waves, wildfires, tornadoes, and hurricanes are some of the problems anticipated.

The UUJEC will have a May 25th webinar that honors seniors who are active in social-justice work. "Gray Panthers and Radical Grannies" is a General Assembly on-demand video now being developed by UUJEC. "Wellness and Mutual Aid" is another video that UUJEC is preparing for congregations. The video will provide some basic information about grassroots organizing.

Protect Your Medicare!

Earlier this year, the Biden administration stopped the expansion of Medicare's ACO-REACH program, which they had created to replace the 2017 Direct Contracting Entity (DCE) program. Both programs allowed financial companies and hedge funds to take majority interests in healthcare-providing entities for the first time, putting profit over care. We were glad to see ACO-REACH stop expanding—but we also wonder if we can trust the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation to not simply rename the program, or create one very similar. The administration has announced a goal of having all Traditional/Original Medicare participants moved into a Medicare Advantage-style program within the decade—even though many Medicare participants have made a very deliberate, educated choice of the program that best suits their needs.

The UUJEC Healthcare Task Force is following National Nurses United, Healthcare NOW!, and Physicians for a National Health Program in efforts to ensure that the public program remains intact—and even improved. Privatization is a threat in so many areas of our society, from healthcare to transit to education and even our military. For Medicare, our immediate suggestion is to check out the Healthcare-NOW! Conference in early April.



Letters!

UUJEC gets requests from various organizations to sign on to a variety of letters. Independently-active board members also suggest sign-ons for consideration by the UUJEC. Here we list our most recent signatures:

- ◆ Declaración Internacional Colombia calling on the Colombian government to withdraw from treaties that allow the nation to be sued in tribunals designed by and for transnational corporations
- ◆ Letter in support of the introduction of the A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice for All Act.
- ◆ Letter opposing the Building United States Infrastructure through Limited Delays and Efficient Reviews Act, ("the BUILDER Act")
- ◆ Letter supporting the Environmental Justice Leadership Forum's request for an extension to respond to the EPA's Request for Information regarding the Environmental and Climate Justice Block Grant Program
- ◆ Letter in support of protecting billions in clean-energy funding included in the Inflation Reduction Act and ensuring that it is not cut in the 2023 Farm Bill, but hopefully expanded
- ◆ Letter to the district forest ranger for Rochester/Middlebury Ranger Districts urging that he rescind or reconsider the Green Mountain National Forest's Proposed Action for the Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project. The proposal is for 11,800 acres of logging in mostly mature and old forests that are among the most carbon-dense in the six-state New England region, harboring important headwaters for the Connecticut River and Lake Champlain.
- ◆ Letter urging the Department of Transportation to reject the use of tax-exempt "private activity bonds" for the Uinta Basin Railway, a project intended to quadruple oil production in Utah's Uinta Basin, which would cause up to an additional 56 million tons of carbon pollution a year.

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UUJEC @ General Assembly

Wellness and Mutual Aid

DESCRIPTION: Congregations are organizing for personal, social, and environmental wellness. Mutual aid moves congregations beyond paternalism and charity and towards partnership, empowerment, and political progress. The wellness concept encourages healthy relationships. The beloved community is possible. Be the change that you want.

MODERATOR: Rev. Robert Murphy, moderator

SPEAKERS: Astoria Nickerson • Nancy 3. Hoffman • Rev. Barbara Meyers • Rachel Myslivy

Working with Labor: Organize, Organize, Organize

DESCRIPTION: Clayola Brown is an African-American leader who guides the national AFL-CIO in its fight against racism and other forms of oppression. She will be interviewed by Unitarian Universalists who are active in human rights work. Organized labor and organized religion can work together. We'll provide a toolkit.

MODERATOR: Carl McCargo

SPEAKERS: Clayola Brown • Denise Moorehead • Terry Lowman • Carlos Jimenez

Gray Panthers and Radical Grannies

DESCRIPTION: Senior citizens are on the front lines for antiracism work, economic justice, climate change, and LGBTQ concerns. Meet radical elders who are active in Unitarian Universalist programs for social justice. How can young and old help each other? We want everybody to look forward to aging.

MODERATOR: Terry Lowman

SPEAKERS: Randy Block • Rev. Barbara Meyers • Cindy Piester • Sally Gellert

Next Steps into Anti-Racism and Reparations

DESCRIPTION: Based on principles and techniques of Social Justice Empowerment, our workshop will apply covenanting principles to build trust needed to, more deeply explore, best practices and formulations for understanding white supremacy. We will make the connection between unresolved white supremacy as a barrier to true democracy and our UU Faith.

SPEAKERS: Carl McCargo • Rev. Dr. Kristen L. Harper • Nina Kavin



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Article II Revision Vote

How Did We Get Here?

Article II of the UUA by-laws is scheduled to be reviewed every 15 years. Votes on previous suggested reviews of Article II were held in 1985 (accepted by delegates) and 2009 (rejected, narrowly). The process this time started at GA 2021; at GA 2022 in Portland, the UUA Article II Study Commission presented its first draft of a possible revision, and there was time for discussion. The commission used feedback from those discussions to create a second draft of a new Article II, and during the year has updated that to a third draft that was presented to the UUA board in January in preparation for this year's hybrid GA in Pittsburgh and on line.

Where Are We Now?

The commission has a full schedule through GA, and we encourage all to get involved in the discussion. The change from Principles and Purposes to Values—complete with 6-petalled graphic, which is loved and hated alike—has taken center stage, but don't ignore the less showy purposes statement, or the simplification of the Inclusion statement.

Does the new version of Article II fit with your image of the UUA? Will it work for your UU community? Does it point us in a direction that we think appropriate or desired? Or does it lose too much of our heritage?

What Next?

This year in Pittsburgh, delegates will participate in what is intended to be the first of 2 votes on the Article II Commission proposal. In preparation, please look for updates and chances to make your voice heard before this June's General Assembly. Chat with friends, family, other UUs, and participate in your CFSs discussion—or lead one, if none are planned!

If the new text passes, it will go on, with further amendment possible only by an 80% vote, to a second and final vote at a (presumably virtual) GA2024.¹

Should the proposal be rejected by delegates at either vote, the process will stop and the current language retained until the next scheduled review.

More information may be found on the Article II Study Commission's [web page](#).

¹Search uua.org for "GA 2024 and Beyond" for a direct PDF download of a possible scenario for future GAs.