



**“The Inside Story on the Moral  
Collapse of the UUA”**  
A Review by Dick Burkhardt of  
**“Used to Be UU:  
The Systematic Attack on UU  
Liberalism:  
What You Need to Know and  
What You Need to Do”**  
by Frank Casper and  
Jay Kiskel (2021)

The saddest story in contemporary liberal religion is the moral collapse of the Unitarian Universalist Association over the last several years, sinking into the cesspool of the neoracism and conspiracy theories spawned by the “whiteness” studies of Critical Race Theory. Casper and Kiskel are UU lay leaders from the Atlanta area who became alarmed after the vicious cancel culture attack that led to the resignation of UUA president Peter Morales in 2017, and the even more vicious witch-hunt against Rev Todd Eklof in 2019.

Kiskel, being an historian, knows how to dig into archives and soon discovered that this spectacular failure of the UUA Board was rooted in the collapse of democracy when the Board size, structure, and nominating process were changed a decade ago. This led to a totally in-bred, unaccountable Board (no contested elections), subject to narrow-minded group-think. The Board became increasingly out of touch with the congregations, subject to capture by zealots for faddish ideologies, even dogmas at odds with the core of our 7 principles. Note: I am quoted on p 27 as warning against the new nominating process at the General Assembly in 2011.

The first result of their work was the “Fifth Principle Project” ([fifthprincipleproject.org](http://fifthprincipleproject.org)), the UUA fifth principle being “the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process...”. In addition Jay is now running for the UUA Board but is already being slandered by the zealots, despite the fact that a UUA task force had already critiqued the democratic deficit and made constructive suggestions to the Board back in 2009.

Now Frank and Jay have added to the earlier recommendations. One easy idea is for the 5 regions to elect board representatives, mirroring the 19 district board members of yore. Another is for all UUs nationally to vote directly for top officials (president, moderator, at large board members) and key bylaw changes, like Article II, which contains the 7 principles and 6 sources. And I might add that, as a professional mathematician and voting expert, digital voting for national offices could easily be done by asking voters to rank or rate their top candidates, resulting in better minority representation for at-large positions.

Now to the controversy. As Casper and Kiskel point out, the recent report from the “Commission on Institutional Change” (COIC) was wildly biased by design. It was entirely couched in both the language and controversial doctrines of Critical Race Theory (CRT), yet CRT was never mentioned and has never been debated by the General Assembly, let alone the congregations or in publications. Why not tout CRT? Or is there something to be ashamed of, or that must remain hidden? And why impose it in a highly authoritarian fashion, complete with witch-hunts and cancellations targeting dissidents, reminiscent of the inquisitions of old?

The answer is that the UUA has good reason to hide this ugliness. Many who’ve looked at CRT with a critical eye have concluded that while claiming to be the gold standard in anti-racism, CRT actually includes strong threads of racism, particularly in the “whiteness” studies which are at the core of UUA doctrine. In fact, some African American public intellectuals call it “neoracism”. This includes a prominent UU black elder, not just well-known critics like John McWhorter. McWhorter sees insincere theatrical performances among “the woke”, plus blacks treated like children or forever-victims by CRT. Instead McWhorter sees adults, though sometimes still struggling, who’ve come a long ways since Jim Crow, despite lingering external and internal obstacles. Others point to the abandonment by CRT of MLK’s vision of “black and white together”.

But to back up a bit, this got going after the 2017 hiring fiasco, after President Morales threw up his hands over the highly racialized vitriol and resigned. The UUA Board then declared that the UUA “harbored structures and patterns that foster racism, oppression, and white supremacy,” followed by a series of continent-wide teach-ins to discuss “the realities of racism and white supremacy in our congregations, in our Association, and in our Faith”. However there was a huge problem with all this, as pointed out by Casper and Kiskel: the claimed “realities” were assumed not proven. A prime illustration of this harmful attitude is the hiring controversy itself, where nasty allegations were made but never substantiated.

An unexpectedly small number of racial incidents now have one-sided documentation in the COIC report, but to this day I have never heard of a validated incident or practice of white supremacy as commonly defined (“one who believes that white people are racially superior to others and therefore should dominate society”}, especially as associated with extremist groups like the Proud Boys. The UUA Board was aware of this deficiency, in that it commissioned the COIC study to “to conduct an audit of the power structures and analyze systemic racism and white supremacy culture within the UUA”. But by assuming what was to be proven, the Board was asking for a biased report – only data to feed their “confirmation bias”, a disaster of methodology from a social science point of view.

What a missed opportunity! We could have had an objective report - an independent, impartial assessment of whether or not systemic racism or white supremacy culture actually exists in the UUA, and if so, to what extent and in what forms. In fact solid evidence for a “white supremacy culture” in the UUA is non-existent, so this claim comes across as some kind of conspiracy theory to many UUs. It was this craziness that caught the attention of Casper and Kiskel.

So what kind of dope was the UUA Board smoking? Well, we’re right back to McWhorter’s “neoracism”. It appears that a small cabal of “People of Color” and their “white allies” are ardent acolytes of the Church of Critical Race Theory, centered on the sect of “whiteness studies”. Note: Many have noted the cult-like flavor of CRT, but McWhorter ([johnmcwhorter.substack.com/p/the-elect-neoracists-posing-as-antiracists](http://johnmcwhorter.substack.com/p/the-elect-neoracists-posing-as-antiracists)) sees it as an actual religion while James Lindsay has demonstrated how it functions as a religion for legal purposes, even if it differs from the traditional institutional forms and rituals of religion. Combine this with white guilt, and it looks like any Board members who may have had reservations were quickly caught up in the religious fervor that blames “whites” for all the world’s ills.

Note: This racial “white blaming” is not the hyperbole you may suspect – just consider the opening sentence of Charles Mills book “The Racial Contract”, a seminal CRT text on white supremacy: “White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today.” The implication of Mills’ astonishing premise is (1) that he considers the modern world to be irredeemably bad, and (2) that this miserable state of affairs is due to an evil form of white identity that exercises its muscle to overpower all political opposition to impose a

harsh regime of oppression and exploitation on all the people of color it can lay its hands on, based on their presumed racial inferiority.

Really? – in the 21st century, and how about before white identity was even a recognized concept? As if John Calhoun’s ante-bellum South defined not only the present but the past of the entirety of all European-related civilizations. Now consider the common definition of racism: “prejudice or discrimination based on race”. Clearly Mills statement, considered factually, is patently absurd, but it makes perfect sense as racial prejudice – in this case, the kind of anti-white prejudice that is the prime characteristic of neoracism. Note: I chose to quote Mills because he was cited in the UU World as a key source of white supremacy doctrine.

Another comment on terminology: The champions of “white supremacy culture” are actually quite aware of the absurdity of their claims but the accusation of “white supremacy” is such a powerful weapon, and they are part of such a ruthless and power hungry movement, that they attempted to redefine this phrase to make it more defensible. But this has produced non-sensical results, such as the 15 “traits” of “white supremacy culture” proposed by Tema Okun. It turns out that none of these traits has any obvious racial content, that all of them could be considered good or bad, depending on one’s point of view and on the situation at hand, and their prevalence in society varies widely. Some are issues that arise in certain bureaucratic environments – that could happen in any racial setting, some are words like “objectivity”, highly valued for uncovering the facts, especially in scientific, legal, and scholarly circles, but demeaned by the acolytes of CRT.

Instead the acolytes of CRT put their faith in “lived experience”, called “anecdotal reports” by social scientists – good for motivating or illustrating research but otherwise subject to severe biases. In fact, when CRT people are asked, “Whose Experience” they typically end up retreating into the select few – the “woke” - the 1%, not the 99% - or if this fails they’ll cherry pick some numbers that misrepresent the overall situation (it’s not hard to “lie with statistics”). When real scholars debate they dig deeply into the numbers, looking for “omitted variables” and how to measure all the factors that might contribute to a perception of “systemic racism”, for example, to see what’s real and by how much. In summary, for real social scientists these purported redefinitions of “white supremacy” are so bad that they fail the laugh test. But they persist as raw insults.

Casper and Kiskel give a good overview of many of these issues in the context of “applied postmodern philosophy”, summarizing key points from the Lindsay

and Pluckrose book “Cynical Theories”. They also illustrate attacks on the 4th UU principle (“a free and responsible search for truth and meaning”), such as certain UU ministers labeling academic-type criticism as “hate speech” in order to shut down debate. In addition there are several powerful documents, such as the public letter of protest by a number UU ministers who resigned from the UU Ministers’ Association to protest the highly unethical treatment of Rev. Eklof.

One of my favorite quotes is about the nasty consequences of CRT: “...this is about how the experience of oppression is weaponized against the very liberal values that supply legitimate avenues for redress” (p 139), not just mob suppression of imagined heresy (the Eklof witch-hunt) but of also the overt abandonment of legal due process (the UUMA kangaroo courts).