


## UU History in a Nutshell

- I. Unitarian Universalism comes out of the Jewish and Christian traditions.
  - A. Origen and Arius, the first Universalist and Unitarian were Christians.
  - B. Martin Luther broke from the Roman Catholic Church, and the Protestant Reformation began.
  - C. The Puritans (who were Congregationalists) were the first successful European settlers on the eastern seaboard.
  - D. Unitarian and Universalist churches *evolved* from protestant faiths.
  - E. Now - we are made up of many different faiths and beliefs.
  
- II. UU History is a multiple choice question; there are ideas about how far back UU history goes.
  - A. The Unitarians and the Universalists joined together in 1961.  
There were no such things as UUs before then. No UUs; No UU history.
  - B. First Unitarian & Universalist churches show up in America in late 1700s.  
Unitarian ministers/churches were in Europe a little earlier than that.
  - C. The Historical Viewpoint:
    1. The first Universalist theologian recorded was Origen in 232 A.O. Origen suggested the bible was just an analogy, and no hell existed.
    2. The first Unitarian theologian recorded was Arius in 336 A.O. Arius suggested that God was eternal, but Jesus was only mortal.
    3. Both Origen and Arius are later considered to be heretics.
  - D. People choose the historical view that best serves their purpose.
    1. The one that is most factually accurate.
    2. Popular among modern scholars and focuses only on the U.S.A.
    3. Gives us credibility and a sense of history.
  
- III. We do have a history of Social Justice and Social Activism.
  - A. Thomas Jefferson - author of the Declaration of Independence  
Believed that all of America would be Unitarian in faith one day.
  - B. Theodore Parker - Radical Unitarian Minister.  
Was Chairman of Vigilance Committee, hiding runaway slaves in house.  
Big supporter of John Brown (leader of failed 1859 raid on the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, WV).
  - C. Margaret Fuller - Friend of Emerson, Editor of *The Dial*, Author, Journalist. Wrote "The Great Lawsuit: Man vs. Woman, Woman vs. Women"  
Inspiration for many in the Woman's Suffrage and Equal Rights fights.
  - D. Thomas Starr King - was both a Unitarian and a Universalist minister (First real UU?)  
Responsible for keeping California a part of the Union in Civil War.  
Considered a hero by many Californians; UU seminary named after him in Berkeley, CA.

We come from a long line of radicals and heretics ;

- A. Miguel (Michael) Servetus - Considered one of the first Unitarian martyrs. He was burned at the stake by order of John Calvin for writing Unitarian ideas. (Also wrote first biologically accurate description of the circulatory system.)
- B. Sebastian Castellio questioned Calvin's orders and questioned the Bible's infallibility. Of Servetus' death he wrote: "To kill a man is not to protect a doctrine, but it is to kill a man." Calvin's followers hounded him until his health failed him, and he died.
- C. King John Sigismund of Transylvania was the first, and the only, Unitarian King. Didn't require his subjects to follow his faith and enforced the Diet of Torda: "All persons may freely embrace the religion and faith they prefer."
- D. John Biddle professes profound disagreement with the trinity; is tried for heresy four times. Rescued from imprisonment repeatedly by well-connected friends, including Oliver Cromwell. In and out of prison, he eventually falls ill and dies there.
- E. Abner Kneeland was a Universalist minister in his native Mass. and briefly in New Hamp. In 1838, he became the last person convicted of blasphemy in the United States, due to his disbelief in many of the traditional teachings of Christianity, including Universalism.
- F. Theodore Parker - One of our more notorious radicals. He preached a sermon entitled: "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity." Unitarians tried to kick him out, but he wouldn't leave. They refused to exchange pulpits with him, a form of censure.
- G. Augustus Conant, the founding minister of this church, was too radical; extreme abolition-of slavery sermons were not appreciated by the congregation. When they demanded that he stop preaching against slavery, he responded by quitting and founding the Rockford UU Church. Later he joins the civil war as a chaplain ministering to the wounded, disregarding the shooting and the extreme weather. His commitment and the inhospitable conditions lead to illness and death.
- H. James Reeb is considered our only UU martyr, answering Dr. King's call for clergy to join the protests in Selma, Alabama. While walking down a street, he was attacked by three white racists; he died a few days later from severe head injuries.
- V.  UUism has led the way in many areas of inclusiveness.
  - A. Olympia Brown - 1<sup>st</sup> woman nationally ordained as a Universalist minister in 1863.
  - B. Celia Burleigh - 1<sup>st</sup> woman nationally ordained as a Unitarian minister in 1871.
  - C. Joseph Jordan - 1<sup>st</sup> black man ordained as a Universalist minister in 1889.
  - D. Marc Belletini - 1<sup>st</sup> openly gay man ordained as a UU minister in 1979.
  - E. Barbara Pescan - 1<sup>st</sup> openly gay woman ordained as a UU minister in 1984.

- VI. We aren't as radical or as inclusive as we would like to think. (then or now)
- A. Theology - every time a new wave of beliefs appeared. some of us denounced it. Fought against Transcendentalists, Humanists and Pagans.
  - B. Slavery - For every minister who spoke out against or worked to end slavery, there was one who was on the side of the merchants and the status quo.
  - C. Woman's Suffrage Movement - Many in the movement were ambivalent/hostile.
  - D. Black Empowerment - In 1967, the new denomination almost split apart. Bitter division on the subject of black empowerment caused many to split.
  - E. Gay Rights - When compared to the other churches, we are on the forefront. Compared to our ideals, it has been a slow and painful process.
  - F. Diversity - Look at our churches. We are still predominantly white, middle class.
- VII. We are rich in diversity, passion, knowledge and history. We are also just rich - though you wouldn't know it from our collection plates.
- A. Members of UU congregations, on average are among the top five on the list of economically well-off denominations.
  - B. Our churches, on average, are consistently in the bottom five of actual amount of money collected from their members.
  - C. Spiritual Work, Social Justice Work and Community Work all require money.
- VIII. A key part of our UU history, identity and future is Congregational Polity
- A. How we describe our way of being and working together.
  - B. Each church is individual, having the sole authority to determine their membership and the ordination of their clergy.
  - C. All of the churches together have agreed to associate and cooperate; working together shared goals and values in the wider world.
  - D. The UUA is the organization made up of the many congregations and churches. They are not an authority; they are a means of facilitating our shared ministry.
  - E. Many people remember the individual congregation part of Congregational polity - and forget the cooperative association portion. Both are imperative to our identity and to our effectiveness.
- IX. UUism is not a prize reserved only for the determined and the lucky.
- A. UUs have more visitors than any other denomination.
  - B. UUs have fewer return visitors than any other denomination.
  - C. There is an unspoken idea that evangelizing is a bad word. It isn't.
  - D. We have something special, and we should be happy and eager to share it.
  - E. We have something to offer visitors, and they have something to offer us.

- X. Being human, UUs have their scars, prejudices and biases.
  - A. Most UUs came from other Christian churches where they were hurt or confused. There is a bias in many of our congregations against Christianity. We have many UU Christians in our pews.
  - B. Many UUs are liberal politically. There is a bias in many congregations against conservatives and Republicans. We have a great many UUs who are conservatives and/or Republicans.
  - C. When we say all are welcome to our house, all are welcome to our faith; we mean all.
  - 0. Our Ideals are high; our intentions are good; th work is hard; mistakes will be made; we are committed to continuing to try.