

Discussion Questions for [*Revisiting the Empowerment Controversy: Black Power and Unitarian Universalism*](#) by Mark D. Morrison-Reed and Michael Glenn

1. What had you been told and what did you believe about the Empowerment Controversy before you read this book? Did reading it change your opinion? If so, how?
2. How was the Controversy an expression of the political situation in the United States as a whole? In what ways was the UUA unprepared for such a political conflict?
3. How did differences between Universalist and Unitarian groups affect the Controversy?
4. How did generational politics affect the Controversy? Do you see this operating within the UUA today?
5. The Black UU Caucus (BUUC) and Black Affairs Council (BAC) used a strategy for Black empowerment known as *caucusing* that was unfamiliar to white Unitarian Universalists in the 1960s but which is widely used and valued today in multicultural group process. Caucusing within identity groups helps avoid dominant culture control of process, and invites a collective voice, rather than only solo voices, from marginalized culture groups. How do you feel about identity caucusing in group process? In politics? In church? Have you seen it used to help multicultural groups reach collective solutions to identified problems?
6. The conflict between supporters of BAC and supporters of Black and White Action (BAWA) has sometimes been framed as a conflict between a “Black power” agenda and an “integration” agenda. BAC was clear that the Black power they were most interested in was economic and cultural. The earlier civil rights movement and BAWA, in challenging segregation, had focused more on civil and voting rights. How do you see the relationship between these different agendas? Are they in conflict? Does one historically grow out of the other? What is the difference between “integration” and “assimilation”?
7. Which historical figure from the period of the Controversy most clearly reflects your own thoughts and understanding of Black empowerment?
8. Morrison-Reed identifies patriarchal systems and presumptions in decision-making within BUUC/BAC, BAWA, and the UUA as a critical factor in the polarization of positions and the inability of participants in the conflict to see or honor each other’s positions? Do you agree? Has patriarchy continued to be a factor in ongoing conflicts often identified as racially based? How?
9. Has your experience in UU settings included relationships that were fractured or disrupted by racial/ethnic interactions? What was the result?

10. Do you recognize patterns today that mirror the challenges faced during the height of the Controversy, either in your own congregation or in the Association at large?

11. During the Controversy the UUA didn't offer a “spiritual container” to help its members listen more deeply to one another, permit self-criticism and compassion, and foster a sense of inter-dependence among all participants. Do you feel this is still true today? If you had been a participant in the Controversy, what spiritual practices would you have wanted to introduce into how things were being handled?

12. How has the UUA evolved since 1970 in terms of racial awareness and practice?