

Voices of the People

Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver

July 5, 2026

Introduction to the Voices © by Rev. Kathryn A. Bert

The first and last sentences of that reading just about says it all. Howard Zinn begins with “I wanted...to awaken a great consciousness of class conflict, racial injustice, sexual inequality, and national arrogance.” And ends with “I want to point out that people who seem to have no power, whether working people, people of color, or women—once they organize and protest and create movements—have a voice no government can suppress.”

This is the voice we need, the one that no government can suppress. And because we are a people who are awake – yes, we are woke: Jesus would approve, as would Buddha. Being spiritually awake is the point. Because we have awakened to the reality of class conflict, racial injustice, sexual inequality and national arrogance, it seemed appropriate that on this 250th anniversary of our country’s founding, that we listen to the voices of those who seem to have no power in the system, but whose power organized, will eventually save us all.

I knew I wanted to be in the pulpit this morning, given the administration’s attack on our values and the historical significance of anniversary. It feels like my job – as long as I have this job - to help us all make meaning of this. But I think there is no better way to do my job than to step back and let you listen to the voices of those among us who have been marginalized, in our country, in our congregation, even: The voices of the people. To that end, let us hear from three members of the Global Majority Group of this congregation.

Voice I: On Visibility by I Li

Hello, my name is I-Li H. I use he/him pronouns. I’m grateful to be living my true identity as a Queer Chinese-American. I’ve learned that it’s important to be visible to others as my true self. I came out to myself during college when I realised that it’s perfectly fine to like other men.

Many queer and questioning Asian American men chose to stay within the perceived safety of the closet for fear of alienation or having to choose between being Asian American or queer. If the person chose the Asian American community, coming out or being outed would be seen as a shame on the family, possibly cutting themselves off from their family and that community support. Choosing the LGBTQ community wasn’t any easier as many large organizations have serious racism problems manifesting in a lack of support for minorities.

When I told my sister that I’m gay, she supported me and didn’t love me any less, she embraced my whole personhood. Then, I faced the challenge of telling my parents that I’m gay. Years later, after I was in a hit and run car accident and was disabled, I lived at my parents’ home. I thought that since they almost lost me, it would be a good time to tell them that I’m gay. I finally got enough courage to tell them. My dad said it’s a western thing. Since he’s a Chinese scholar, he should have know that queers existed in China for a long time, but maybe he didn’t know since there’s always been a covering up or erasure of queer history. Over time, my father had lessened his connections with me. When he

departed from this planet, there was no real closure. But, later, it was comforting to be fully accepted by a Japanese American dad that had a gay son.

My mom thought it was just a phase, but now she's much more accepting.

I live in a country that I call home. Ironically, it's also a place that has denied rights to other Chinese immigrants and queer people. It's important for my own safety to be around others that accept me as a queer Chinese-american person.

I ask all of you to do your best to understand someone that's different from you because we're not carbon copies and beautiful in various ways!

Voice II: On Belonging and Community by PJ

"Doesn't it seem the times in which we live almost cries out for a group such as this to take root, and develop leaders within as an antidote to the rise of racism in our country?" ---Dean Yamamoto

When Sue Oshiro-Zeier first invited me to join the Global Majority group back in July of 2024, I was excited but I also had some ambivalence.

"What is 'the Global Majority?' Can we actually say that or is it just a semantic push back against the term 'White Supremacy?' I had become very accustomed to being one of the few, or the only person of color in most spaces.

Then another worry became of more concern; "Would they accept someone like me?"

This plagued me because transracial adoptees often occupy a frustrating liminal space where we are obviously not white Americans (no matter how assimilated we may be), but we also do not fully fit in with the diaspora of our country of origin.

When I first started attending the group, it took me a bit to acclimate and feel comfortable. I was worried that we would be perceived as committing 'reverse racism.' I had never been in exclusively global majority spaces before. I've since learned I was not the only one with some initial ambivalence about the name of our group. Many of us were raised to 'go along to get along', didn't want to draw too much attention to ourselves or risk upsetting whom we knew to be of the dominant American demographic.

Upon my research, the term 'Global Majority' is indeed factual, with people who are of African, Asian, Indigenous, Latin American or mixed-heritage collectively making up approximately 85% of the global population. After attending a couple meetings, I was confident that they were living up to the group's stated purpose of 'Growth through meaningful shared exploration of being Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color in a white Nation, and supporting each other by recognizing the oppression that exists in our society, mitigating those effects and striving to equalize power imbalances."

For some important history; this group was initiated by Sue Oshiro Zeier, Ken, Dean, Clem, I Li, Ronnie, Karla, and DJ. For many years there were whispers of wanting to start a BIPOC group of some kind but there were never enough members to actually start one. That changed during the initial years of the covid-19 pandemic. The group had its first official meeting in November of 2023 at a local

Filipino/Mexican Fusion restaurant. They began working collectively to choose their name and composed their purpose statement. They wanted to include educational activities co-planned and facilitated with the Beloved Community Work Group with strong support by our minister. We have studied various aspects of privilege, identity, and cultures. We also practice multicultural communication and calling-in (rather than calling out) conflict that may arise within our beloved community.

This group has been transformative to this congregation at large as well as my own personal trajectory. I struggled to connect with others since 2016, when I first started attending UUCV. Belonging with them extends beyond simply trying to find people who look exactly like me or have the same background. We celebrate and validate each other's lived experience in solidarity. We learn more about each other as individuals as well as the beautiful cultures that we all hail from. I've slowly learned to become more comfortable in my identity. I'm starting to take up more space, which is quite a feat for someone my size to begin with. My sense of belonging and involvement within the congregation really got traction after I started attending the Global Majority Group. Not long after getting involved with them, the crossover in membership led me to join the Beloved Community Work Group. I've gone on to help facilitate the Pride Group and am now a Worship Associate. None of those things would have happened without the crucial first step of being welcomed into the global majority group.

Voice III: On Patriotism by Walida

250 years of the great American experiment has culminated into this moment we sit with today. For some, that moment is one of pride and joy, and yet for others it is precarious at best if not tragically disappointing; to witness the evolution of a nation, heralded as the leader of the free world, coming undone by its frayed edges.

Was this nation, supposedly founded on the principles of liberty, justice, and freedom for all, ever truly tenable? "A republic," but only "if you can keep it", said a man of importance once.

So to whom do we trust to steward this land and its people? What is the litmus test? When I was a child, I thought there was only one. That all you needed was a love of country; devotion to the welfare of one's compatriots; and a passion which inspires one to serve. A patriot.

And in this country, where an immigrant can travel for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and become a citizen, I consider myself a patriot. I soon realized that was not enough.

When my elementary school teacher asked us what we wanted to be when we grew up (because anyone can aspire to be anything in this country), I said I wanted to be the president. She smiled with sympathy as she begrudgingly replied, "oh. Maybe not that. You weren't born here". As if I had a choice in the matter.

When I asked my high school ROTC counselor how I could join the military, he looked at me and said, "Walida Hassan. That's your name, right? you know what? I'm going to call you Wall-eater from now on. Yeah...wall eater". He then laughed me out of his office, and I never went back.

And recently, when I returned from an international trip, I handed my US passport to the agent at the counter, who informed me that my passport did not list me as an American citizen (a trick question they

later admitted, to catch immigrants entering with forged documents). A cold and unfeeling, "You're clear to go" replaced the standard greeting and warmth of "Welcome Home".

I wonder if any of them knew how much I love this land. Could they tell, by the color of my skin or my maiden name, that I too believed in the American dream? which Lady Liberty offers when she says "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

Did they know that on the night of 9/11, I prayed to Allah (the most compassionate, the ever merciful) for the safety of OUR troops... even though they were deployed to murder 4.5 million of my Muslim kin? (innā li-llāhi wa-innā `ilayhi rāji`ūn. "To G-d we belong and to G-d we shall return")

Some people believe that my resulting anger and frustration with this nation and all its hypocrisy is evidence of some foreign, fanatical hatred of western culture and values, and they need never speak to me to come to that conclusion.

And to that I say, as James Baldwin did, "I love America, and exactly for this reason I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually".

My mother once said, "the place you die is where your soul was born". And I can't help but smile whenever someone tells me to "just leave if I don't like it, and go back to where I came from", because little do they know, my soul was born here.

I will not leave. I will not abandon the people. I will stay and fight on Turtle Island... I will remember and honor the First Peoples of this stolen land. I will give thanks to the ancestors and spirits of the people whose blood, sweat, and tears built this nation.

As a patriot I will stay and challenge this nation to do better, to be better, And I believe that anyone else who is willing to do the same has the spirit of America within them.

Because this country, despite its vile and ruthless history, belongs to all people, who are indeed created equal by the will of G-d; this country that can be called by any other name and still aspire to be the land of the free, this great experiment of stubborn resilience, hope, and audacity...is ever evolving (thank G-d for progress, thank G-d for change), and that is what I will be celebrating on this Anniversary of our nation.

And at this time I ask my community to reflect on the difference between patriotism and nationalism, on the function of freedom (which is to free someone else- Toni Morrison), because none of us are TRULY free until we're all free. Realize that no one can judge who IS or isn't American enough, and to be brave enough to redefine our institutions and systems. That in order to create a more perfect union, may we transform into something collectively new, in a way that includes all of our souls. Not just the fair and fortunate few.