



**Unitarian Universalist History in a Nutshell
March 2019**

**Adapted from Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof, February 2018,
and Michael Kruse, February 2019
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Today sociologists classify Unitarian Universalism as an NRM, a new religious movement, a friendlier term for what they formally called "a cult." This may be because the Unitarian Universalist Association didn't form until 1961, but our faith has been around a lot longer than that.

Foundation of Beliefs

Unitarian...

— belief in single deity—

...Universalism

— belief that all are worthy of salvation—

- **Most progressive and influential denomination**
 - Racial justice
 - Liberation movements
 - International peace
 - Community health
 - Separation of church and state

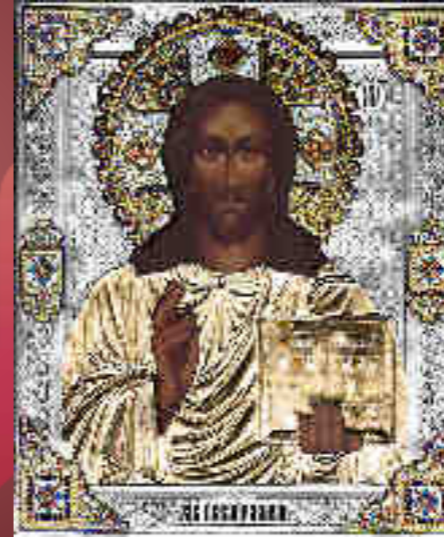
Unitarian Universalists are grounded in two fundamental principles: a belief in a single deity and a conviction that everyone is born without inherent fault; all are equally worthy of doing good.

UUs are one of the most progressive and socially influential denominations, promoting:

- Racial justice
- Liberation movements
- International peace
- Community health
- Separation of church and state

Unitarian Universalist History in a Nutshell

- Love one another
- **Starts with historical, human Jesus & his Jewish followers**
- Live sustainably enough for today
- Heal the sick and feed the poor
- Nonviolent civil disobedience
- Equality (2000 CE)
- Forgiveness



There's a good case for tracing the origins of UUism back to at least the 16th century, but you can trace it even further back to this fellow, Jesus of Nazareth. Being Jewish, Jesus and his original followers were Unitarian in their theology, meaning they believed in only one god, which is the original meaning of Unitarianism. As such, they saw Jesus as a human being and followed him because of his humanitarian and communitarian teachings to:

- Love one another
- Share our wealth
- Live sustainably and seek only enough for today (our daily bread)
- Heal the sick and feed the poor and hungry
- Practice nonviolent noncooperation with oppressive authorities
- Promote equality and inclusion of those who've been left out, and
- Forgive, even our enemies.

Although some UUs may not describe ours as a Christian religion, these values remain at the heart of who we are and what we do.

Unitarian Universalist History in a Nutshell

Origen of Alexandria
185 – 250 CE

- First Systematic Theology
- All humans, and even devils, shall be finally restored through the mediation of Christ. (Universalism)
- The souls of humans had existed in a previous state, and that their imprisonment in material bodies was a punishment for sins which they had committed. (Reincarnation)
- Tortured to death (250); Works declared heresy in 543 and ordered destroyed.



Not only were Jesus and his first followers Unitarian in their theology, the very first systematic Christian theologian, Origen of Alexandria, born in the 2nd century, was a Universalist, meaning he did not believe in eternal damnation, which was the original meaning of the term. He thought that everyone, even demons, would eventually be held in the eternal embrace of an all-loving god. Interestingly, he also believed in reincarnation, in the preexistence of our souls before we are born on Earth to redeem ourselves. So, the very first Christian theologian was both Unitarian and a Reincarnationist in his thinking. Unfortunately, he was declared a heretic, tortured to death, and his writings destroyed, though the Christian Church has had an on-again, off-again appreciation for him to this day.

Unitarian Universalist History in a Nutshell

Arius
250 – 336 CE

- **Arianism:** Jesus is not “God”, but human
- **325 CE:** Emperor Constantine’s Council of Nicaea; declares Arius a heretic; determines Father and Son are “*of one substance,*” (Divine Jesus)
- **381 CE:** 1st Council of Constantinople adds “Holy Spirit,” inventing Doctrine of Trinity
- **Makes Arianism/Unitarianism illegal**



Upon Origen’s execution, another controversial Christian thinker was born, Arius, a Unitarian theologian who did not equate Jesus with God. Emperor Constantine, having made Christianity the official Roman religion, wanted an end to the growing Arian debate and convened the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, instructing Church leaders to settle the dispute once and for all by declaring the Father and the Son “of one substance,” making Jesus the same as God. 56 years later the 1st Council of Constantinople added the Holy Spirit to the mix, inventing the Doctrine of the Trinity and making Arius’ Unitarian beliefs illegal. So, as you can see, between Origen’s Universalism and Arius’ Unitarianism, which both preceded the Trinity, it’s fair to say, we were here first.

Dark Ages

Roughly 6th to 14th Centuries

After our ideas were outlawed, the Dark Ages fell upon us, lasting about 800 years.

Enlightenment

Then came... the Enlightenment...

Unitarian Roots - Technology Drives Faith

Reading & interpreting the Bible for Oneself



Michael Servetus
(1509 - 1553)



Gutenberg Bible
(1440s)



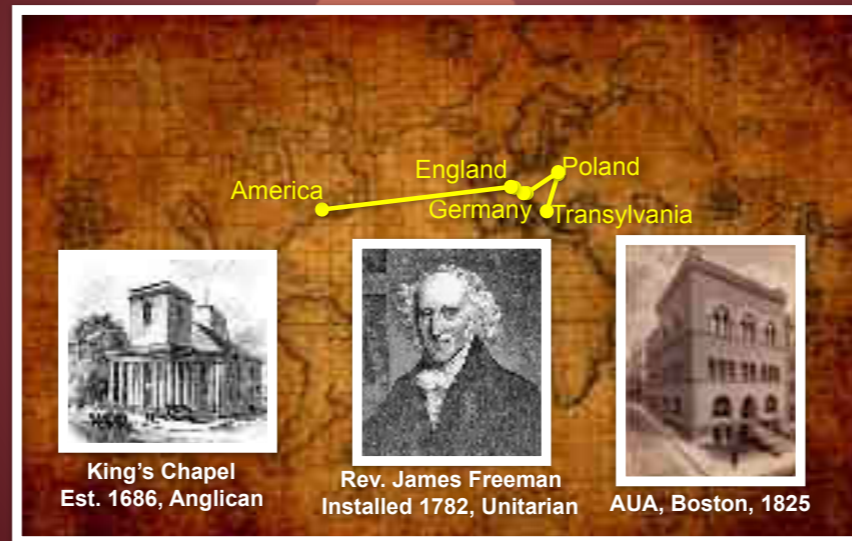
Printing Press (1439)

You could say that technology is what took us out of the Dark Ages. Thanks largely to the invention of the Printing Press in 1439, its first book being the Gutenberg Bible, it became possible for people to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, an opportunity exploited nearly a century later by a young Spanish theology student named Michael Servetus.

Servetus couldn't find any mention of a Trinity in the Bible, so he published a manuscript, *On the Errors of the Trinity*. John Calvin rewarded him for his insights by condemning him and burning him at the stake.

Whether people agreed with Servetus or not, many considered it a harsh punishment for a figure who was popular and well liked. So, along with his revised belief in just one God, a belief that necessarily humanized Jesus, came the belief that we shouldn't harm each other over our ideas, a value that, as much as anything else, has come to define Unitarianism.

Unitarian Roots



Unitarianism spread through Eastern Europe from Hungary and Transylvania to Poland, on into Germany, then England, and eventually made its way to what became known as America.

Historic King's Chapel, the first Anglican Church in Colonial America, established in Boston in 1686, installed Unitarian Minister, James Freeman in 1782, making it the oldest Unitarian Church in the nation.

Forty-three years later, it was the site of the founding of the American Unitarian Association. So, clearly, Unitarianism has been around a longer than just since 1961.

Universalist Roots

John Calvin (1509 -1564)

Doctrine of Predestination

- Only an Elect few will be saved for eternity.
- They were foreordained before the foundations of the world.
- The rest will suffer eternal hell.
- The decision is final!



That's a quick evolution of Unitarianism. What about Universalism?

In addition to Origen's disbelief in eternal damnation, people also rejected the rigid teachings of John Calvin to formalize Universalism. Remember that Calvin asserted that...

-...only a few people, the Elect, were chosen for salvation...

-...before creation itself.

-The rest, he said, will suffer the torments of Hell for all eternity. (Bummer!)

-Moreover, the decision is final, so there's nothing anyone can do to change it. Bleak, eh?

Universalist Roots

John Calvin (1509-1564)

Universalist Reaction

- **Universal Atonement (Jesus died for everyone)**
- **Free Will (People are free to choose salvation)**
- **God only knows (who will choose salvation and who won't).**
- **The decision is theirs!**



Calvin triggered a backlash, as tyrannical leaders often do.

Universalists, understandably, reacted strongly because they believe the exact opposite:

- Atonement is universal-everyone can be saved,;
- People have free will to choose salvation;
- Only God knows what they will choose, not some human religious leader;
- But the decision is theirs.

Universalist Roots

Rev. John Murray 1741 - 1815



“Go out into the highways and by-ways of America... Give the people, blanketed with a decaying and crumbling religion, something of your new vision. You may possess only a small light but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them, not Hell, but hope and courage.”

A couple of centuries after Calvin, a Universalist-leaning English minister, John Murray, who had been excommunicated by the Presbyterians because of his beliefs, became despondent and gave up the ministry after the death of his spouse and child. Moved by hope, he headed for the New World to begin a new life.

While in route, his ship ran aground off the Jersey shore.

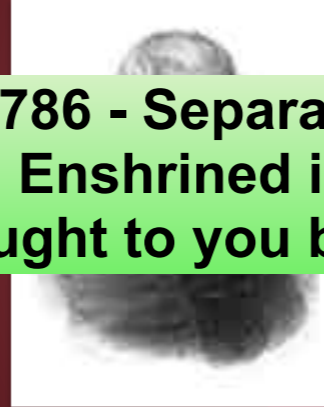
Once ashore, he met a farmer named Charles Potter, which as been called the first and only Universalist miracle, for it so happened that Potter was himself a Universalist, had built a chapel nearby, and had been praying for God to deliver a Universalist minister.

Although reluctant, under the circumstances, Murray couldn't refuse and delivered the first Universalist sermon in Colonial America on September 30th, 1770. He may have escaped England, but he could not escape the ministry, and went on to help spread Universalism with an evangelical fervor. It is Murray who famously said:

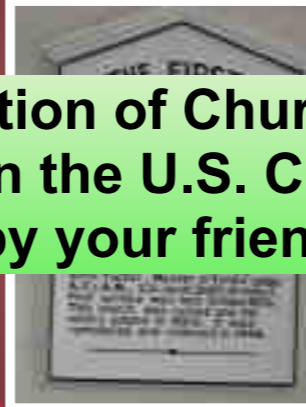
“Go out into the highways and by-ways of America... Give the people, blanketed with a decaying and crumbling religion, something of your new vision. You may possess only a small light but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them, not Hell, but hope and courage.”

Universalist Roots

**1786 - Separation of Church and State -
Enshrined in the U.S. Constitution -
Brought to you by your friendly Universalists**



John Murray



First Universalist
Church in
America



Universalist Church
of America 1793, PA

Murray eventually settled in Gloucester (Glaw-ster), Massachusetts, and in 1774, four years after his landing and first sermon in America, became founder and pastor of the First Universalist Society in America.

Twenty years later the Universalist Church of America was founded and headquartered in Pennsylvania. When his church was formally established in 1779, its 61 members claimed independence from the Church of Christ in Gloucester. As the official church there, the Church of Christ began persecuting the Universalists for heresy, including having the authorities confiscate their church belongings to help cover their mandatory tithe. So they did what any good Universalists would do, they sued. And in 1786 they won their case, which made it illegal for churches to be publicly funded anywhere in the country.

Separation of church and state, brought to you by the Universalists.

Universalist Roots

1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention

Slavery is “contrary to the plainest dictates of natural justice and Christian love... [and to] that doctrine of Universal Grace and Love which we cherish as the most important of revealed truth.”



The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840
by Benjamin Robert Haydon
oil on canvas, 1841

In 1840, a generation before the Civil War, some of our most prominent leaders participated in the World Anti-Slavery Convention calling for an end to slavery everywhere. Three years later, during the Universalist's Annual Convention, they passed a resolution stating:

“Slavery is contrary to the plainest dictates of natural justice and Christian love... [and to] that doctrine of Universal Grace and Love which we cherish as the most important of revealed truth.”

Universalist Roots

1845 – “A free colored man and his family” joins Mt. Olympus Universalist Society *in Alabama!*



The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840
by Benjamin Robert Haydon
oil on canvas: 1841

Not long afterward, a former slave and his entire family were allowed to join the Mount Olympus Universalist Society in, get this, Mt. Olympus, Alabama! In 1845!

Universalist Roots

- 1880: Universalists ordained Joseph Jordan (1842-1901), our first African American minister.
- Jordan founded First Universalist Church of Norfolk, VA (1887) and a school for African American children staffed by Quakers, Unitarians, and Universalists.



In 1880 the Universalists ordained Joseph Jordan as our first African American minister. He started a Universalist Church in Norfolk, Virginia, which included a Freedman School for African American kids staffed mostly by Quakers, Unitarians, and Universalists.

Unitarian **Universalist** History in a Nutshell

- By 1863 the Universalists became the first religious denomination to officially ordain a woman, Olympia Brown, as a minister.
- Brown was the first woman to graduate from a Theological School, among the first generation of suffragists, and lived to see the ratification of the 19th Amendment.

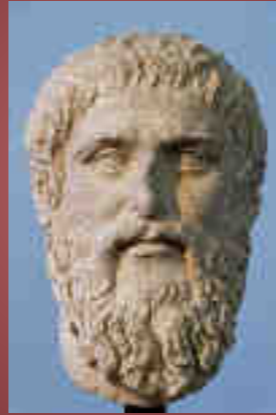


In 1863, the Universalists also became the first religious denomination to officially ordain a woman minister, Reverend Olympia Brown. Born in 1835, she was also the first woman in the country who graduated from a Theological School, was among the first generation of women suffragists, and lived until 1926, long enough to see the ratification of the 19th amendment recognizing women's right to vote.

Unitarian Universalists Across History



Socrates
470 BC



Plato
420 BC



Issac Newton
1643 CE

History has been shaped by many people with beliefs consistent with Unitarian Universalism.

We can trace it back to the Greek Philosophers including Socrates, Plato and others. Socrates was executed because he disagreed with the state that "might makes right". He said that he is not a citizen of Athens nor Greece, but a citizen of the world. He questioned authority and felt no one desires evil...a Universalist principal.

England had a special influence on American UUism, as noted previously, but we should also recognize Isaac Newton, an English mathematician, physicist, astronomer, theologian, and author, who also espoused UU principles.

Unitarian Universalist Herstory

Worked to establish women's rights through women's suffrage movement.



Mary Wollstonecraft
(1759 - 1797)



Dorothea Dix
(1802 - 1887)



Margaret Fuller
(1810 - 1850)



Elizabeth Cady
Stanton
(1815 - 1902)

The list of Unitarian Universalist thinkers in America is long, indeed. We can start with some of the women who have shaped the faith.

They include Mary Wollstonecraft, best known as the author of *Frankenstein*, but she also wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and is considered the 18th century's foremother of feminism.

Dorothea Dix chose to become a Unitarian as an adult, and is remembered for her work establishing hospitals and improving conditions and treatment for the mentally ill.

Margaret Fuller, born a Unitarian, America's first female book reporter and herself the author of the first major feminist book, *Woman in the 19th Century*, fought for women's suffrage, women's education, prison reform, ending poverty and homelessness, and advocated for racial equality for blacks and Native Americans.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton attended a Unitarian Church. Stanton was an abolitionist, and voting rights activist who also struggled for birth control and property rights for women, and served as the President of the National Woman Suffrage Association.

Unitarian Universalist Herstory...more...



Julia Ward Howe
(1819 - 1910)



Susan B. Anthony
(1820-1906)



Clara Barton
(1821-1912)



Laura Towne
(1825 - 1901)

Julia Ward Howe, who wrote *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, was another woman's suffragist, abolitionist, and social activist, who left her Calvinistic upbringing to become a Unitarian.

Susan B. Anthony

- Attended the Unitarian church in Rochester
- Instrumental in getting the women's right to vote
- First woman to be honored on a US coin
- Of particular interest in Utah, Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton both spoke at the SLC Tabernacle in 1871. They thanked Utah on being the first state to recognize, in the previous year, that women have the right to vote. That right was revoked by Congress fifteen years later in 1887. In 1878, Anthony spoke again, to 6,000 people, at the SLC tabernacle at the Rocky Mountain Suffrage Convention. She said, "Failure is impossible."

Clara Barton

- A Universalist, founded the Red Cross, one of the most respected charities in America.

Laura Towne

- Founded the first school for freed slaves, the Penn Center near Beaufort SC. Martin Luther King spoke there.

Unitarian Universalist Thinkers in America



John Adams
2nd President

Thomas Jefferson
3rd President

John Quincy Adams
6th President

Millard Fillmore
13th President

William Taft
27th President

And, of course, history has recorded many male influences, too. Let's run through some of the more notable ones.

They include five presidents:

John Adams: 2nd president of the United States

Thomas Jefferson: 3rd president of the United States; who said, "I rejoice that in this blessed country of free inquiry and belief, which has surrendered its creed and conscience to neither kings nor priests, the genuine doctrine of one only God is reviving, and I trust that there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die an Unitarian."

John Quincy Adams: 6th president of the United States; according to some sources, he is considered to have had the highest IQ of any president

Millard Fillmore: 13th president of the United States; declared slavery an evil, though one beyond the powers of the federal government. He founded and was the first chancellor of the University of Buffalo. He was also the president who approved Utah as a territory and appointed Brigham Young as the first governor, leading Utah to name their first capital after him, Fillmore, Utah

William Howard Taft: 27th president of the United States and the tenth chief justice of the United States, the only person to have held both offices.

(Even James Madison's and George Washington's theologies were considered Unitarian by Steven Waldman in his book *Founding Faith*.)

Unitarian Universalist Thinkers in America



Joseph Priestley



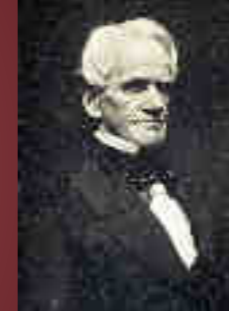
Paul Revere



Benjamin Rush



Samuel Morse



Horace Mann

Others include:

Joseph Priestley, the founder of the Unitarian church in England, but he was also the scientist who discovered oxygen. He supported the French revolution which led to a mob burning his home and church. He fled to the USA.

Paul Revere: A silversmith, artist, and Revolutionary War officer.

Benjamin Rush: a Universalist, physician, politician, social reformer, humanitarian, and educator as well as the founder of Dickinson College, and father of American psychiatry. He graduated Princeton at age 14 and published the first chemistry text in U.S.

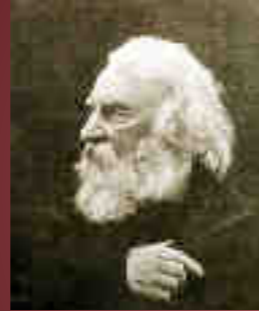
Samuel Morse: painter, inventor, telegraph, Morse code

Horace Mann: Promoted free, non-sectarian public education for all. ~50 schools are named in his honor.

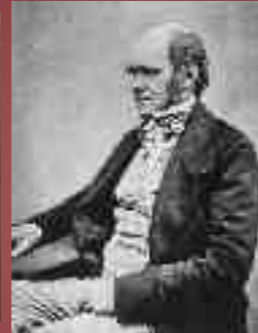
Unitarian Universalist Thinkers in America



Ralph Waldo
Emerson



Henry Wadsworth
Longfellow



Charles Darwin



James Freeman
Clark



Charles Dickens

Ralph Waldo Emerson: American philosopher

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: American poet and educator whose works include "Paul Revere's Ride", The Song of Hiawatha, and Evangeline

Charles Darwin; explored many new worlds and developed theory of evolution, articulated in the "Origin of Species."

James Freeman Clark: the first Unitarian minister to meet with Lincoln. It was Clark who asked Julia Ward Howe to pen The Battle Hymn of the Republic.

Charles Dickens; author and poet.

Unitarian Universalist Thinkers in America



Henry Berg



Walt Whitman



Thomas Starr
King



Frank Lloyd
Wright



Buckminster
Fuller

Henry Berg

- Founded the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Founded Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Walt Whitman: Poet.

Thomas Starr King: Universalist Minister, credited by Lincoln with preventing California from becoming a separate republic. He was called "the orator who saved the nation".

Frank Lloyd Wright:

- Writer, educator, architect and interior designer, who designed more than 1,000 structures, 532 of which were completed.
- Wright believed in designing structures that were in harmony with humanity and its environment.

Buckminster Fuller:

- Architect
- Systems theorist
- Author
- Designer
- Inventor
- Futurist.

Unitarian Universalist Thinkers in America



Linus Pauling



Clyde Tombaugh



Gaylord Nelson



Robert Fulghum

Linus Pauling: Won Nobel prizes in Chemistry and Peace; chemist, biochemist, peace activist, author, educator, and husband of American human rights activist Ava Helen Pauling.

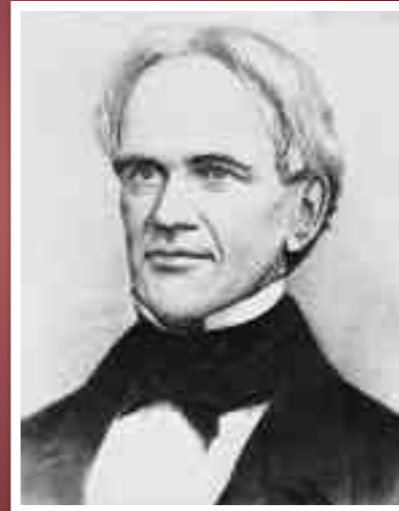
Clyde Tombaugh: founded a Unitarian Church in Las Cruces, NM. He also discovered Pluto and called for the serious scientific research of unidentified flying objects, or UFOs...

Gaylord Nelson: Wisconsin Governor and later Senator for Wisconsin. The founder of Earth Day. Vince Lombardy dubbed him as the "nation's #1 conservationist".

Robert Fulghum: wrote "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" in 1988, which stayed on The New York Times bestseller lists for nearly two years.

Unitarian Universalist History 1830s-1840s

“...our Public
Schools are not
Theological
Seminaries.”



One of our greatest causes and accomplishments has been support of nonsectarian education. In fact, educational reformer Horace Mann, who is considered the founder of Public Education and went on to become a Massachusetts Congressman, was a member of First Parish Unitarian Church in Dedham, Massachusetts. The emphasis on non-sectarian education increased religious freedom and separation of Church and State.

He said, “...our Public Schools are not Theological Seminaries.”

Unitarian Universalist History 1960s - Anti-War

As early as 1964 the
Unitarian Universalists
passed a resolution
against the Vietnam War.



In the 1900s, we were among the first religions to protest wars, passing a resolution stating as much in 1964 about the Vietnam War.

Unitarian Universalist History 1960s - Civil Rights

That same year, Unitarian Universalist Minister, James Reeb was murdered in Selma, Alabama advocating Civil Rights. And two years later, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a lecture before the UUA's General Assembly.



That same year, one of our young ministers, James Reeb, was among those murdered in Selma, Alabama advocating for Civil Rights. His sacrifice inspired Dr. King to speak during our General Assembly a short time later.

Unitarian Universalist History in a Nutshell

Universalist, Adin Ballou,
advocated non-violence in his
book, *Christian Non-
Resistance...*

...who influenced Leo Tolstoy...

...who influenced Gandhi...

**...who influenced Martin
Luther King, Jr.**

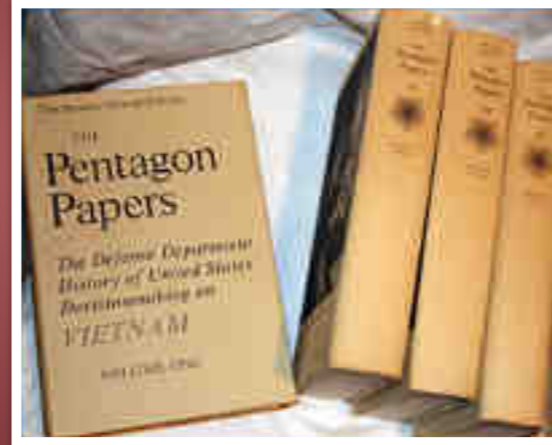


It was a Universalist minister, Adin Ballou, whose book on nonviolence, "*Christian Non-Resistance...*"

- ...who influenced Leo Tolstoy...
- ...who influenced Gandhi...
- ...who influenced Martin Luther King, Jr.

Unitarian Universalist History in a Nutshell

1971 the Federal Government, began investigating the UUA's bank records, in retaliation for its publication of the *Pentagon Papers*.



In 1971, the UUA became the original Wikileaks by publishing the Pentagon Papers, resulting in Federal retaliation and the seizing of our financial records. The case was headed for the Supreme Court, but was dropped in the wake of the Watergate scandal.

Unitarian Universalist History 1970s - Death Penalty

First to begin advocating for better treatment of prisoners and to abolish the death penalty.



Unitarians and Universalists have long stood for abolishing the death penalty, and in 1974 passed a general resolution stating as much at a time when most States were passing legislation to reestablish its practice.

Unitarian Universalist History

1961

Unitarian Universalist Association - 1961

**Universalists believe
God is too good to
damn them...**

**Unitarians believe
they are too good to
be damned!**




As you can see from all this history, the Unitarians and the Universalists share a lot in common. The running joke is that the Universalists believe God is too good to damn them, and the Unitarians believe they are too good to be damned. So, in 1961 we got together and formed the Unitarian Universalist Association, or the UUA, as we like to call it.

Unitarian Universalist History 21st Century

**2013 - Unitarian
Universalists in Spokane
Washington help make
Marriage Equality legal in
their state, which begins
cascade of legalization
throughout the nation.**



As in the past, we're still making history, as we did in 2013 when a church in Spokane worked to pass Marriage Equality in Washington state, which started a cascade of similar decisions around the nation, until the Supreme Court itself agreed with us just two years later.



**And the rest...
is history...
to be made!**

These are just a few of the historical highlights that impress, though the history of our faith is so rich, there are many events and persons we've left out. Perhaps you will be inspired to discover some of them for yourself, or, even better, become one of our religion's history makers.

