

Whitney M. Young, Jr. (1921-1971)



Whitney M. Young Jr. (1921-1971) was a social worker, educator, administrator and activist. In the late 40s while serving as the industrial relations secretary of the St. Paul, Minnesota Urban League he and his wife, Margaret, were invited to attend Unity Church (Unitarian). He was already acquainted with the congregation's minister the Rev. Arthur Foote who was on the board of the local Urban League.

The family moved to Omaha in 1950 when he became the executive director on the Omaha Urban League. As in St. Paul the local Unitarian minister, Rev. John Cyrus was a member of the local League board, and as in St. Paul he was involved with both an African Methodist Episcopal congregation and the Unitarians. In both places this did not sit well with some members of the African-American community. Nevertheless, among African American who became UUs, maintaining dual affiliation was not an uncommon practice, and Young would maintain connection to black church culture through his life. In Omaha Margaret and their daughter, Marcia, became a part of the First Church Sunday School, and while Margaret joined on December 31, 1950, Whitney did not.

When the Youngs moved to Atlanta, after Whitney became the chair of the School of Social Work at Atlanta University they visited the United Liberal Church (Unitarian Universalist) and joined the congregation in December 1954. Subsequently he was elected to the congregation's board. Again he was criticized by some African-Americans for attending a "white" church.

In 1961 when Whitney became the executive director of the National Urban League the family moved to New Rochelle they attended but never joined the White Plains Community Church (Unitarian). Young's consul was highly valued and although the demands on his time were great he let himself be elected to the board of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee in 1961 and in 1963 to be appointed to the UUA Commission on Religion and Race. It was also during the 60s that his sister, Dr. Arnita Young Boswell (1920-2002), a professor at the University Of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, joined the First Unitarian Society of Chicago.

In December 1970 when Young told Peter H. Samsons, the minister of the White Plains Community Church, that they would attend occasionally his relationship to UUism was in transition, but his untimely death on March 11, 1971 means we cannot know where his religious life was leading.

By Mark. D. Morrison-Reed

Other Sources:

- “Black Leader in a White Denomination: Whitney M. Young and the Unitarians,” Dennis C. Dickerson, *Journal of UU History*, Vol. XXV, 1998, pp. 26-40.
- <http://archive.uua.org/programs/justice/antiracism/jtwsunday/wyessay.html>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitney_M._Young
- They did not joined the First Unitarian Church of Omaha in 1950, while he served as a board member of ...Atlanta, then a member of the Community Church of Whites Plains and in 1963 was appointed to the UUA Commission on Religion and Race.
<http://archive.uua.org/programs/justice/antiracism/jtwsunday/wyessay.html>