

Race, Poverty, & Religion

2018 NEH Buddhist East Asia Summer Institute

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Race & Poverty

- * TU gen ed— fulfills race and diversity requirement
- * Offered by Religion department
- * 16 weeks
- * Tu Th, 9:30-10:50 ; 2-3:20

Course Goals

Students will...

- * Develop a sophisticated understanding of race and racism as dynamic concepts, pointing to the ways in which race intersects with other identifications or ascriptions such as gender, class, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, or disability.
- * Understand the relationships among race, power, and capitalism within the context of global white supremacy
- * Investigate the various constructions of race and forms of racism across places and times
- * Discuss race matters with diverse others in relation to personal experience
- * Learn to reflect upon their own values, assumptions, and beliefs and how those assumptions and beliefs shape their actions
- * Understand and apply knowledge in and across disciplines
- * Explore the role of religion in addressing social justice issues

Course Outline

- * Unit 1: Theories of Race and Racism
- * Unit 2: Slavery, Repression, and Capitalism
- * Unit 3: Race and Structural Inequality
 - * Health
 - * Housing
 - * Labor & Employment
 - * Disenfranchisement
 - * Surveillance, Police, & the Carceral State
 - * Gender and Sexuality
- * Unit 4: Religion and Social Justice

Unit 4 Questions

- * What is religion?
- * What do different religious traditions say about social justice?
- * How have religions (texts) engaged with issues related to race and poverty? How are people from these communities grappling with these problems?
- * How does religious practice function as or play a role in resistance?
- * What is liberation theology?
- * In what ways are marginalized communities redefining or re-interpreting their faiths?
- * How has religion played a role in colonization? What about decolonization and healing? eg., addressing structural injustice including poverty and racism, providing solutions (such as reparations)

Case Studies

- * Hinduism: Issues with colorism and the caste system
 - * Buddhism: Issues with karma and reincarnation, healing POC communities
 - * Judaism: Reclaiming the Mikveh & Jewish anti-zionism
 - * Islam: Issues of anti-black racism & rethinking binary gender and sexuality
 - * Santeria: LGBTQIA+ inclusion
- (Christianity will already have been discussed with relation to slavery)

Buddhism Module

- * Karma and compassion
- * Ethics of karma framework ; ex. issues of fish catch and release, blaming poor people for their suffering
- * Buddhism's ability to address structural issues?
- * Practice of buddhism in Japanese internment camps
- * Buddhism in Oakland ; POC meditation practices and the East Bay Meditation Center
- * Buddhism in liberatory ideology/practice

Readings

- * *Religious Diversity--What's the Problem?: Buddhist Advice for Flourishing with Religious Diversity*, Rita Gross. Chapter 15: "Talking With Religious Others: Dialogue and Interreligious Exchange" (on the issue of religious pluralism)
- * bell hooks: Buddhism, the Beats and Loving Blackness <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/bell-hooks-buddhism-the-beats-and-loving-blackness/>
- * Building a Community of Love: bell hooks and Thich Nhat Hanh <https://www.lionsroar.com/bell-hooks-and-thich-nhat-hanh-on-building-a-community-of-love/>
- * Queen, Christopher S., and Sallie B. King, eds. *Engaged buddhism: buddhist liberation movements in Asia*. SUNY Press, 1996.
- * Harvard Divinity School "Buddhism in Japanese American Internment Camps" article, resources, and discussion questions: https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/files/hds-rlp/files/minority_religion_buddhism.pdf
- * Burley, Mikel. *Rebirth and the stream of life: A philosophical study of reincarnation, karma and ethics*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2016. Chapter 6 "Karma and Evil" (Karma as a principle of moral guidance, the problem of 'blaming the victim')

Activities

- * Debate: Is it necessary for religion to address issues of social justice?
- * “Acting on Faith: Women’s New Religious Activism in America,” 2005. (42 minutes) and discussion
- * Religious Service Activity

Sacred Site Visit Reflection

Description:

For this assignment, you will visit one religious service or established sacred activity (see me if you need further clarification) and reflect on your experience. After attending the event, you will write a 2-3 page reflection. The reflection will address the following questions:

1. Who is the person describing the service? Who are you? Where are you coming from, contextualize yourself as the observer. What expectations, reservations, etc. did you bring with you to this particular service and how might this have colored your reaction. Were you surprised? Did you like it/dislike it? Why?
2. What kind of service or event are you attending and how is it being conducted? Is it a morning, afternoon or an evening event? Is the service primarily being conducted in English or another language? How participatory is it? Do only men play an active role? What about the women, the children? How formal is it?
3. What is it like? Describe the place, the setting.
4. What do you think? Were you surprised by anything? Did you enjoy the service/event? Would you go back? Would you tell your friends to go? WHY? What did you expect to find? And what does this experience add to your understanding of Buddhism?
5. Did the service address any issues of social justice? What was the issue and how was it talked about?