

COLA 1500-013: Religion, Tradition, and Social Justice in Charlottesville

University of Virginia, Fall 2021

Professor: Dr. Nichole M. Flores Email: nmf5q@virginia.edu Office Phone: (434)243-3937 Office Location: Gibson S433	Class Meeting: Tuesdays 9:30-10:45am Classroom: Brooks Hall 103 Office Hours Sign-Up: calendly.com/nmf5q Twitter: @nicholemflores
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Charlottesville-area clergy, national religious leaders, and community members participate in non-violent counterprotest of Unite the Right rally on Saturday, August 12, 2017. Image by Jordy Yager.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religious leaders and activists have played an integral role in shaping the politics and culture of Charlottesville, the surrounding counties, and its institutions. In August 2017, religious leaders were on the frontlines of the counterprotest against the white supremacist violence of the Unite the Right rally that rocked the very stability of democracy in the US. Long before those hot summer days, however, religious institutions had figured prominently in shaping Charlottesville's politics, culture, and even the cityscape. Even so, churches and their leaders have also been a force in perpetuating various forms of injustice and for failing to cooperate with the good in cultivating a more just city where everyone can thrive. A comprehensive view of Charlottesville's past, present, and future requires attention to the role of religious communities—including their beliefs and practices—in shaping democratic democracy in Charlottesville.

Anchored by conversations about the pursuit of social justice among various religious groups in Charlottesville and at UVA, this seminar will curate conversations between students and various clergy, religious activists, and institutions in Charlottesville about their work for justice in the city with a particular eye toward racial justice and equity concerning Charlottesville's legacies of slavery, white supremacy, and anti-immigrant sentiment. The seminar will also allow students to develop a more nuanced account of religion and how the concept operates in our local, national, and global common life.

ASSIGNMENTS

Seminar Participation - 30%

- The success of a seminar-styled class depends on thoughtful and consistent participation from everyone in the class. I encourage you to make comments during our discussions while also being aware of taking up too much “airtime” that could hinder others from also contributing to the conversation.

Weekly Reflections (posted to Collab “Discussions”) - 30%

- To foster a good class conversation, each student will submit a weekly reflection on that week’s assigned materials (readings, podcasts, etc.). These reflections need not be more than a paragraph or so in length. They should give me a sense of what resonated with you from the readings, questions that you might have, and/or comments on how the reading assists our larger understanding of the relationship between religion, tradition, and social justice in Charlottesville. **Weekly response posts should be uploaded to Collab Discussions each Mondays by 12pm.** Responses must be received in time so that Prof. Flores has a chance to read them and prepare for seminar discussion on Tuesday morning.

Final Assignment: Create a digital report on religious or faith-based and social justice advocacy initiative in Charlottesville - 40%

- For our final assignment of the semester, each student will produce a digital report on a particular example of religious or faith-based social justice advocacy in Charlottesville. This should be an initiative we did not cover in class. **Final assignments should be submitted via Collab Assignments by Tuesday, December 7 at 11:59PM.**
- The report should describe an initiative by a particular religious or faith-based group to address a social issue facing the local community. After identifying the issue and group(s) involved, a good report will include:
 - a sense of the history/background of the issue
 - a description of the actions that the group(s) are taking to address the issue
 - the student’s analysis of the pros and cons of the group(s) actions. This analysis can draw upon our class readings, comments from our speakers, insights from our seminar conversations, and other materials that help evaluate the strengths and limitations of the initiative
 - comments on how this project might interact with the larger pursuit of justice and equity in Charlottesville (especially if you are able to connect it to the initiatives we will discuss in depth over the course of the semester)
 - use of multimedia that incorporates images/photos, videos, and/or sound files, etc. to offer an engaging presentation of your findings.
- You can use any digital platform to create the report (Prezi, Sway, Wix, etc.) as long as the student can create a link to the report.
- Students should feel free to consult with me (Prof. Flores) or each other to identify a religious or faith-based social justice initiative and to think about how to present and analyze the initiative.
- You are encouraged to think about this project early in the semester and begin working on it by the middle of the semester so that it does not become too burdensome to you at the end of the semester.

- The link to the digital report should be submitted via Collab Assignments by December 7 at 11:59pm. Please DO NOT SUBMIT VIA EMAIL.

QUESTIONS ABOUT ASSIGNMENT DETAILS OR OTHER COURSE-SPECIFIC MATTERS? SUBMIT THEM VIA COLLAB DISCUSSIONS FORUM, “COURSE QUESTIONS.”

REQUIRED TEXTS

- All readings will be available as online links in this syllabus or posted to Collab under Resources>Readings.

COURSE OUTLINE

PART I: INTRODUCTION

Week 1 - August 24

Course Introduction and Class Introductions

Week 2 - August 31

Justice and Equity, Race and Place

Nichole M. Flores, [“It’s hard to define what home means in today’s world. The Psalms can help.”](#) *America: The Jesuit Review of Faith and Culture*

Campbell Robertson, [“A Fight Over Zoning Tests Charlottesville’s Progress on Race.”](#) *The New York Times*

PART II: SLAVERY AND ITS LEGACIES IN CHARLOTTESVILLE

Week 3 - September 7

Slavery Remembered at UVA

Holland Cotter, [“Turning Grief for a Hidden Past Into a Healing Space.”](#) *The New York Times*

Week 4 - September 14

The Black Church in Charlottesville

(CO) James Cone, “‘Nobody Knows de ‘Trouble I See,’ The Cross and the Lynching Tree in the Black Experience,” *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*

Week 5 - September 21

Being Black in Charlottesville

Garnette Cadogan, [“Walking While Black.”](#) *Literary Hub*

PART III: RELIGION AND WHITE SUPREMACY IN CHARLOTTESVILLE

Week 6 - September 28

Religion, Tradition, and #Charlottesville

Nichole M. Flores, [“When the KKK came to town, Catholics prayed. Now what?.”](#) *America: The Jesuit Review of Faith and Culture*

Willis Jenkins, [“Moral Trauma.”](#) *Medium*

Week 7 - October 5**Religious Witness on August 11 & 12, 2017**

Nichole M. Flores, [“What is the Role of a Public Theologian Today?”](#) *America: The Jesuit Review of Faith and Culture*

Week 8 - October 12**READING DAY, NO CLASS MEETING****Week 9 - October 19****Taking The Statues Down**

[“American Idols.”](#) *Sacred & Profane* podcast, 20 July 2020

Hawes Spencer and Michael Levenson, [“Charlottesville Removes Robert E. Lee Statue at Center of White Nationalist Rally.”](#) *The New York Times* (read article and watch video)

Week 10 - October 26**ADVISING APPOINTMENTS, NO CLASS MEETING****Week 11 - November 2****Religious Leadership in Charlottesville After the Statues**

Patty Medina, [“Charlottesville Clergy Collective unpacks difficult conversations.”](#) *Charlottesville Tomorrow*

PART IV: LATINES, COVID, AND INEQUALITY IN CHARLOTTESVILLE**Week 12 - November 9****Latines Before Covid: Sanctuary for Maria**

Abigail Clukey, [“Undocumented Woman Finds Healing and Support in Sanctuary.”](#) *NPR*

Week 13 - November 16**Latines and Covid in Charlottesville**

Billy Jean Louis and Jessie Higgins, [“Latino residents account for 25 percent of all COVID-19 cases in Charlottesville area.”](#) *Charlottesville Tomorrow*

Jessie Higgins, [“This is how the Charlottesville-area’s Latino community became one of the most highly vaccinated racial groups in the state.”](#) *Charlottesville Tomorrow*

Week 14 - November 23**THANKSGIVING WEEK, NO CLASS MEETING****Week 15 - November 30****Religious Responses to Latines and Covid in Charlottesville**

(CO) Julie Hanlon Rubio, “Cooperation with the Good,” *Hope for Common Ground: Mediating the Personal and the Political in a Divided Church*

Week 16 - December 7**FINAL ASSIGNMENTS DUE BY 11:59PM VIA COLLAB ASSIGNMENTS, NO CLASS MEETING**