

Religion, Tradition, and Social Justice in Charlottesville

University of Virginia, Fall 2022

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Charlottesville-area clergy, national religious leaders, and community members participate in counterprotest of Unite the Right rally on Saturday, August 12, 2017. Image by Jordy Yager.

Course Description:

On August 11 & 12, 2017, religious leaders (including pastors, lay people, theologians, public intellectuals, and religious activists) were on the frontlines of counterprotests against the white supremacist violence of the Unite the Right rally that rocked the local, national, and even global discourse about race, place, and justice to the core. Long before those hot summer days, however, religious institutions had figured prominently in the pursuit of a more just city, shaping Charlottesville's politics, culture, and even the cityscape with unyielding—even eschatological!—hope for cultivating truth, goodness, and beauty. Even so, religious institutions, people, and their leaders have also perpetuated various forms of *injustice* in this city, including racism and white supremacy, and have often worked *against* fostering the conditions and coalitions necessary for an authentic common good. 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 a common interest in the role of various religious groups in Charlottesville and at UVA in the pursuit of their respective visions of social justice, this seminar convenes conversations between students and clergy, religious activists, and institutions in Charlottesville. The seminar will allow students to develop a more nuanced account of religion and how the concept operates in our local, national, and global common life.

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Assignments:

Seminar Participation - 40% of final grade

- The success of a seminar-styled class depends on thoughtful and consistent participation from all students 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% of final grade

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

Final Group Assignment: Group multimedia presentation on religious or faith-based and social justice advocacy initiative in Charlottesville - 30% of final grade

- In groups of 4 or 5, students will produce a multimedia report on a particular example of religious or faith-based social justice advocacy in Charlottesville. PRESENTATIONS MUST NOT EXCEED 10-MINUTES IN LENGTH: This is to ensure that each group has time to present their work and take a couple of questions from the class. **Group presentations will be given on December 1st during our final seminar meeting of the semester.**
- The presentation should describe and evaluate an initiative by a particular religious or faith-based group to address a social issue facing the local community. Reports should include:
 - a brief history/background of the issue,
 - a description of the actions that the group(s) are taking to address the issue,
 - 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), and
 - use of multimedia that incorporates images/photos, videos, maps (via Google Earth, for example), and/or sound files, etc. to offer an engaging presentation of your findings.
- Students should feel free to consult with Prof. Flores to identify a religious or faith-based social justice initiative and to think about how to present and analyze the initiative.

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- Your group is 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.

Course Materials:

All course material (readings, videos, audio recordings, etc.) will be available either as hyperlinks in the syllabus or available on the class Collab site under the “Resources” tab.

Course Outline:

Week 1 – August 25

Introduction: Justice & Equity, Race & Place

Week 2 – September 1

History, Memory, & UVA’s Monuments

Watch: [Raised/Razed](#)

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

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

Walking Tour of Grounds with Caro Campos – Meet on Lawn-Side of Rotunda (on the right side as you look at the Rotunda from the Lawn)

Week 3 – September 8

NO SEMINAR MEETING

Sunday, September 11

Field Trip to Monacan Nation – The bus will depart at 1pm and return at 6pm. More details forthcoming.

Week 4 – September 15

Occupied Land, Occupied Faith

Read: [“Pope Francis’ apology to Indigenous Peoples in Canada”](#)

Read: Soong-Chan Rah, “Standing Tall: Richard Twiss, a Witness to Native American Humanity” in *Can I Get a Witness?: Thirteen Peacemakers, Community Builders, and Agitators for Faith and Justice* (Reading available on Collab)

Week 5 – September 22

Slavery Remembered at UVA

Watch: [Enslaved on Grounds: Slavery at the University of Virginia](#)

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Visit to the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers – Meet at the Memorial

Week 6 – September 29

The Black Church in Charlottesville

Read: James Cone, “‘Nobody Knows de Trouble I See,’ The Cross and the Lynching Tree in the Black Experience,” *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Reading available on Collab)

Week 7 – October 6

Religion, Tradition, and Charlottesville

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

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

Week 8 – October 13

Religious Witness Before, During, and After Charlottesville

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

Week 9 – October 20

Taking the Statues Down

Read: 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)

Watch: [Unveiling: The Origins of Charlottesville’s Monuments](#)

Week 10 – October 27

Religion and Sanctuary in Charlottesville

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

Week 11 – November 3

Covid in Charlottesville

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

Read: 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 12 – November 10

Religion, Organizing, & Solidarity

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

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Wednesday, November 16

Field Trip to see a performance of Violet at LiveArts – additional details forthcoming.

Week 13 – November 17

Conversion, Reconciliation, and Justice

Read: Nichole M. Flores, *The Aesthetics of Solidarity: Our Lady of Guadalupe and American Democracy*, Chapters 4 & 5 (Reading available on Collab)

Week 14 – November 24

NO SEMINAR MEETING – U.S. THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Week 15 – December 1

GROUP MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATIONS