

Reli. 261: Making the Invisible, Visible: A Multi-media Exploration of Race and Racism through a Buddhist Lens

Spring 2019

M-W 3:30-4:45 pm.

Buttrick Hall 213

Dr. Jan Willis, Instructor

Office 218-A Buttrick Hall

Office Hours: T: 2:00-4:00pm



I. Course Description:

Using film, musical and written sources, this course will explore the issues of race and racism in modern-day America using a Buddhist Lens. In keeping with Buddhist teachings, our task will be to “see”, to recognize, and to gain insight into the causes and manifestations of personal bias and institutional and systemic racism in order to begin to dismantle and to eliminate its harmful effects.

II. Required Books:

1. Ruth King’s Mindful of Race.
2. Mycal Denzel Smith’s Invisible Man, Got the Whole World Watching.

3. Debbie Irving's Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race.
4. Bryan Stevenson's Just Mercy.
5. Patrisse Khan-Cullors' When They Call You a Terrorist.

III. Recommended Books:

1. Claudia Rankin, Citizen: An American Lyric.
2. Ta-nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me.
3. Douglas Blackmon, Slavery By Another Name.
4. Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow.
5. Paula S. Rothenberg (ed.), White Privilege.
6. Carol Anderson, White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide.
7. Marc Lamont Hill, Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable, From Ferguson to Flint and Beyond.
8. Bernestine Singley (ed.), When Race Becomes Real; Black and White Writers Confront Their Personal Histories.
9. Jim Wallis, America's Original Sin.
10. Derald Wing Sue, Overcoming Our Racism; the Journey to Liberation.
11. Jan Willis, Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist and Buddhist—One Woman's Spiritual Journey.
12. Jennifer Ritterhouse, Growing Up Jim Crow; How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race.
13. The DOJ Ferguson Report.

IV. Required Films/Documentaries/Ted Talks:

1. "Intersectionality" by Kimberle Crenshaw (Ted Talk)
2. "Love Has No Labels" (AdCouncil ad)
3. "Race; the Power of an Illusion" (PBS Series)
4. "The Danger of a Single Story" by Chimamanda Adichie (Ted Talk)
5. "I Am Not Your Negro" (James Baldwin/Raoul Peck)
6. "The Matrix"
7. "Kung-fu Panda"

V. Recommended Films:

1. Boyz N the Hood
2. Menace II Society
3. New Jack City
4. Juice
5. Jason's Lyric
6. Straight Outta Compton
7. Hidden Figures
8. "The House I Live In"
9. "Slavery By Another Name" (PBS Series)
10. "Billions Behind Bars" (PBS Series)
11. Selma
12. Crash
13. Do the Right Thing
14. Malcolm X
15. To Kill a Mockingbird
16. Birth of a Nation (1915)
17. Birth of a Nation (2016)
18. American History X
19. Mississippi Burning
20. Twelve Years a Slave
21. Fruitvale Station
22. The Help
23. Get Out
24. BlackkKlansman
25. Dhamma Brothers

VI. Featuring Music from:

Bob Marley

Tupac

Jay-Z

Bob Dylan

J. Cole

Broadway shows

John Legend and Common

Sweet Honey in the Rock

Macklemore

Sarah Bareilles

VII. Requirements for Course and Basis of Evaluation:

1. Attendance at each class session. Missing more than two sessions may require your being asked to withdraw from the class. (25% of grade)
2. Reading and thoughtful reflection about all class materials, as demonstrated by your verbal participation in class discussions. (25% of grade)
3. Timely submission of all written assignments. Late papers are unacceptable. If submitted late-with cause-paper will be docked one full grade. (50% of grade)

VIII. Writing Assignments and Due Dates:

1. When was the very first time you realized that you were Black/white/a person of color? What were your emotions at the time? Tell the story, with details, in one typed page. **Due Monday, January 28th at the beginning of class.**
2. Write a 1-2 page typed and well-written essay on, What key Buddhist principle does this movie suggest and/or elaborate upon? **Due on Monday, February 18th at the beginning of class.**
3. Write a 1-2 page typed Research paper on #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName. **Due at the beginning of class (February 20th).**
4. Research "prison population and demographics in the U.S." Print-out your research in 1-2 pages. **Due March 27th at the beginning of class.**
5. Research "poverty" and "wealth," in the world and in the U.S. Print-out your research in 1-2 typed pages. **Due April 10th at beginning of class.**
6. Choose a movie or rap song that, in your opinion, best illustrates or illumines race and racism and, in 1-2 typed pages, after briefly describing the piece, explain why you chose it. **Due at the beginning of class, April 15th.**

IX. Schedule, Topics and Readings:

January

- 9** First Session. Introduction to, and Logistics of, the Class.
Key Buddhist Principles. How one gains wisdom. The Importance of "seeing" in Buddhism. Recognition and transformation. "Agreements" about how we engage with each other.
- 14** Individual Introductions. Answer this two-part question: *What challenge(s) and good fortune(s) has/have brought you here?*
- 16** Buddhism "101." **Assignment:** Read "The Buddha's First Sermon" from Rahula Walpola's What the Buddha Taught, pp. 92-94 and from Andy Kozak's Everything Buddhism Book, pp. 15-39.
- 21** Discussion of Basic Buddhist Principles, continued. The "Noble Eight-fold Path" from Andy Kozak's Everything Buddhism Book, pp. 41-52.
- 23** Class exercise: "Labels". Watch Ad council's "Love Has No Labels." **Written assignment:** When was the very first time you realized that you were Black/white/a person of color? What were your emotions at the time? Tell the story, with details, in one typed page. **Due on Monday, January 28th**, at the beginning of class.
- 28** Watch in class and discuss: Chimamanda Adichie's (Ted Talk), "The Danger of a Single Story." What is lost?
- 30** Watch in class and discuss: Two excerpts from PBS's "Race the Power of an Illusion." What did you learn (that you hadn't known before)? Assignment: Read Debbie Irving's Waking Up White...pp. 1-99.

February

- 4** Discussion of Debbie Irving's Waking Up White..., pp. 1-99. Read for next time: Debbie Irving's Waking Up White...pp.100-142.
- 6** Is "white privilege" real? Read and Discuss pieces by Tim Wise ("Membership Has Its Privileges...") and Peggy Mackintosh ("White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"). Read: Debbie Irving's Waking Up White..., pp. 100-142. Watch video on, and skit by CK Louis, on (The Benefits of) "Being White." Assignment: Read Mycal Denzel Smith's Invisible Man...pp.1-93.
- 11** What does being in a black male body feel like? Discussion of Mycal Denzel Smith's Invisible Man, Got the Whole World Watching, pp. 1-93.
- 13** **No Class.*** Watch—"The Matrix" or "Kung-fu Panda."**Written Assignment:** Write a 1-2 page typed and well-written essay on, What key Buddhist principle does this movie suggest and/or elaborate upon? Essays are **due on Monday, February 18th**, at the beginning of class. Read Mycal Denzel Smith's Invisible Man...pp. 93-163.
- 18** Discussion of Mycal Denzel Smith's Invisible Man...pp. 93-163.
- 20** Discussion of Mycal Denzel Smith's Invisible Man...pp. 165-219.
- 25** Watch and discuss Kimberle Crenshaw's (Ted Talk): "Intersectionality." **Written Assignment:** Write a 1-2 page typed Research paper on #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName due at the beginning of next class (February 20th).
- 27** Discussion of #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName and Buddhist *Metta* Meditation.

March

4-8 Journeys/Peak Week

- 11-15 Spring Break (*Reading Assignment:** Read Patrisse Khan-Cullors' When They Call You a Terrorist, pp. 3-108.

- 18** Discussion of Khan-Cullors' When They Call You a Terrorist, part one. **Reading Assignment:** Read When They Call You..., pp. 111-253.
- 20** Discussion of Khan-Cullors' When They Call You a Terrorist...Part two, pp. 111-253. **Assignment:** Read Bryan Stevenson's Just Mercy, pp. 3-146.
- 25** Prisons in the U. S. and who inhabits them. Discussion of topic based upon pp. 3-146 of Bryan Stevenson's Just Mercy **and** your research. **Written assignment:** Research "prison population and demographics in the U.S." Print-out your research in 1-2 pages and bring to next class.
- 27** Continued discussion of Just Mercy, pp. 147-310.

April

- 1** Complete discussion of Just Mercy.
Poverty and Inequity in the U.S. Who goes to prison?
- 2** Poverty and Natural Disasters. Watch **video**, "Like Animals in the Conventions Center" and listen to Jay-Z's "Minority Report."
Assignment for next time: Research "Poverty and the Wealth Gap in the U.S. (and in the World)" and write about it in one-two pages. Bring these pages with you to our next (**April 10th**) class.
- 10** **Discussion of "poverty."** **Writing Assignment:** Choose a movie or rap song that, in your opinion, best illustrates or illumines race and racism and, in 1-2 typed pages, after briefly describing the piece, explain why you chose it. **Due at the beginning of next class, April 15th.**
- 15** Discussion of your essays. **Assignment:** Read and take notes on Baldwin's "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew..."
- 17** Discussion of "My Dungeon Shook; Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation."
- 22** Watch "I Am Not Your Negro."
- 24** Discussion of "I Am Not Your Negro."

May

- 1 Last Class.** Where do we go from here? What can we each commit to doing? Round-up discussion and your **concrete** suggestions.

Let's enjoy and get to work!