

Buddhism, Race, and Sexuality

PAX 2500

Fall 2020

Dr. Rima Vesely-Flad
Tuesday/Thursday 10-11:20am Online

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Office hours by appointment

Course Description

Buddhism, Race, and Sexuality examines central themes in writings and critiques within Buddhism in a Western context. We will investigate the textual and social history of Buddhism, with a particular focus on the integration of Buddhist teachings with western psychology, and the interpretation of Buddhist teachings in multiracial and gender diverse contexts. Together we will explore how Buddhist teachings—such as the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, Ultimate and Relative Reality, the Five Aggregates and Non-Self, the *Satipattana Sutta* and awareness practices, especially of the body—have been employed to heal traumas experienced by Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). We will also study how GenderQueer identity, particularly of non-binary, gender non-conforming, and transgender practitioners, are interpreted and embraced. Finally, we will explore how spiritual, psychological, and political practices of liberation are embodied, with a focus on personal thriving, *sangha*, and collective love.

Learning Outcomes:

- Understanding core tenets and texts of Buddhism, a non-Western religious tradition;
- Investigating Buddhism in a Western context;
- Examining how Buddhism has been incorporated into traditionally Western disciplines (such as psychology);
- Analyzing how People of Color and GenderQueer practitioners interpret Buddhist teachings.

Assessment

20% - Final Research Paper (10-12 pp.)

20% - Final Take Home Exam

20% - Mid-semester Paper

20% - Thinking & Writing online responses to readings (due Tuesday & Thursday)

20% - Class Participation

Required Course Texts

Rev. angel Kyodo williams and Lama Rod Owens with Jasmine Syedullah, *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*

Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening Through Race, Sexuality, and Gender*

Kevin Manders and Elizabeth Marston (eds.) *Transcending: Trans Buddhist Voices*

Lama Rod Owens, *Love and Rage*

Week One: Introduction to Course

August 18th

Introduction to course/overview of syllabus

August 20th

Community building

Week Two

August 25th

Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathways to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, chapter 1, pp. 3-31 [WWC Online Library]

Em von Euw, "Coming Home to Themselves: The Resonance of Non-self and Impermanence for Transgender Buddhists," in *Transcending: Trans Buddhist Voices*, pp. 235-246

August 27th

Menakem, chapters 5 & 6, pp. 108-130; 140-155 [WWC Online Library]

La Sarmiento, "Preface," in *Transcending*

Foundations of Buddhism

Week Three

September 1st

Donald Mitchell and Sarah Jacoby, "The Life of Gautama Buddha" in *Buddhism: Introduction to the Buddhist Experience*, pp. 6-30

September 3rd

Mitchell and Jacoby, "The Teachings of the Buddha," in *Buddhism: Introduction to the Buddhist Experience* pp. 31-64 (Moodle)

Dukkha, Non-Self, Five Aggregates, Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path

Liberating the Black Body: Race and Sexuality

Week Four

September 8th

Erin Treat and Sebene Selassie, Race and Dharma Course, *Barre Center for Buddhist Studies* "5 Aggregates Lecture," pp. 1-9

Rima Vesely-Flad, "Racism and *Anatta*" pp. 79-97 (Moodle)

September 10th

Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, pp. 1-12 (WWC Online Library)

Rima Vesely-Flad, "Black Buddhists and the Body: New Approaches to Socially Engaged Buddhism," *Religions*, pp. 1-10 (WWC Online Library)

Larry Yang, "Refuge in a Multicultural World" in *Awakening Together: The Spiritual Practice of Inclusivity and Community*, pp. 51-71

Week Five

September 15th

Rev. angel Kyodo Williams et. al., *Radical Dharma*, pp. xi-xxx, 39-56.

Earthlyn Zenju Manuel, *The Way of Tenderness*, pp. 3-34

September 17th

Manuel, *Way of Tenderness*, pp. 35-74

Week Six

September 22nd

Manuel, *Way of Tenderness*, pp. 75-126

September 24th

Lama Rod Owens, *Love and Rage*, pp. xiii, 1-49

Week Seven

September 29th

Owens, *Love and Rage*, pp. 51-56, 66-85, 117-139

October 1st

Mid-semester pause

Week Eight

October 6th

Owens, *Love and Rage*, pp. 140-187

October 8th

Owens, *Love and Rage*, pp. 187-212, 225-249, 271-278

Conversation with Lama Rod

Week Nine: No Class

October 13th

Research mid-semester 5-page paper

October 15th

Mid-Semester 5-page paper due: upload on Moodle by midnight

Week Ten

October 20th

Rev. angel Kyodo Williams and Lama Rod Owens, *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*, pp. 89-104, 115-135

October 22nd

Williams and Owens, *Radical Dharma*, pp. 137-170

Week Eleven

October 27th

Williams and Owens, *Radical Dharma*, pp. 171-204

October 29th

Jasmine Syedullah, "The Unbearable Will to Whiteness" pp. 143-159 [Moodle]

Syedullah, "Radicalizing Dharma Dreams," in *Radical Dharma*, pp. 75-88

Week Twelve

November 3rd

Election – No class

Non-Self and Impermanence: Trans Voices in the Dharma

**All readings are found in *Transcending: Trans Buddhist Voices*

November 5th

Fresh "Lev" White, "Blessing: Our Bodhisattva Awakening," pp. xxiii-xxix and "I am Everything, I am Nothing, I am Spirit Manifested," pp. 81-86

Finn Enke, "What is a Body, Anyway?" pp. 5-11

Cooper Lee Bombardier, "Soil, Shit, and Compost," pp. 13-20

Zavo Gayatri Martohardjono, "Untitled," pp. 21-25

Michelle McNamara, "*Karma* Chameleon?" pp. 27-34

Adahmh Roland Hoeltzel, "When Duality Falls Away," pp. 135-142

Week Thirteen

November 10th

Shaun Bartone, "Conduct Unbecoming," pp. 35-41

Bk, "Trans is Home," pp. 43-45

Coral Short, "My Trip Back Home," pp. 47-51

Cypress Atlas, "Gender and Emptiness," pp. 53-56

Sasha Strong, "Queer Radical Dharma," pp. 65-73

November 12th

Chance Krempasky, "Growing to Know," pp. 75-79

Lu Lam, "Yellow Poppy and an Aniccagender Heart," pp. 103-113

Sebastian De Line, "The Bardo," pp. 125-129

Elizabeth Marsten, "Working with Nothing," pp. 131

Kevin Manders, "Becoming Whole Just to Let It Go," pp. 161-168

Week Fourteen

November 17th

Jacoby Ballard, "A Lotus Dependent on the Mud," pp. 177-185

Mx. Finn Lofton, "Person of Color, genderqueer, Buddhist, seeking space for practice, ideally in the woods," pp. 185-191

C.E. Giyu Gillis, "On Transitioning," pp. 201-207

Zoyander Street, "Abandon Any Hope of Fruition," pp. 223-228

Thuy Vanh, "Barriers Faced by Trans People of Color in Buddhist Communities," pp. 229-234

November 19th

Final Exam Review

Course Wrap Up

Wednesday, November 25th

Final Exam due at Midnight

Wednesday, December 2nd

Final Paper due at 4:30pm

Additional Course Requirements

Responses:

- Twice-weekly responses to prompts due at **9am Tuesday/Thursday**
- Each response will be graded with a ✓+ (4 points), ✓ (3 points) or ✓- (2 points), or no credit.
- You are allowed to skip four (4) of the responses that are required over the course of the semester without penalty.

5-Page Mid-Semester Analytical Paper: Due Thursday, Oct. 15th at Midnight

***Upload on Moodle**

This 5-page paper presents an opportunity to think about Buddhist teachings on liberation in relation to embodiment in a highly racialized context. Choose one thinker from the syllabus (or elsewhere) and:

1. Identify a Buddhist doctrine that has been particularly important for this thinker.
2. Research this Buddhist doctrine using scholarly and popular sources (a minimum of three) and
3. Analyze how this thinker expands the Buddhist doctrine through their particular lens.

Examples:

- Zenju, in *The Way of Tenderness*, reflects on one of the "Three Marks of Existence," non-self (*anicca*) in relation to her experience as a Black woman
- Zenju, as a Black woman, embraces the First Noble Truth: "Life is suffering."

- Lama Rod, in *Love and Rage*, lifts up the Heart Sutra as well as relative and ultimate reality
- Rev. angel Kyodo williams, in *Radical Dharma*, employs “The Four Vows”: *Beings are numberless; I vow to save them all. Desires are inexhaustible; I vow to put an end to them. The truth is boundless; I vow to perceive it. Liberation is unattainable; I vow to attain it.*
- Sebene Selassie, in *You Belong*, writes of delusion and her experience as an African immigrant in the U.S.
- Sebene Selassie, in her dharma talk, writes of the 5 aggregates in her acknowledgment of racism

Other teachers and texts to consider:

Ruth King, *Mindful of Race*

Larry Yan, *Awakening Together*

Jan Willis, *Dreaming Me*

Anything by Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama

Grading rubric (20% for each category)

- Argument
- Structure
- Creativity
- Writing
- Grammar

You may use any citation method with which you are familiar, as long as it is consistent.

Final Paper Requirements: 10 pages, including the thinker from your mid-semester paper

Put your first thinker, from your mid-semester paper, into conversation with a second Buddhist thinker who is writing explicitly on gender and/or sexuality. You may choose a second thinker from the syllabus or elsewhere.

- Introduce the second thinker’s approach one of his/her/their arguments. For example, you might choose a thinker from the anthology *Transcending*.
- Explain *your own understanding of what your second thinker is saying in his/her/their essay*. For example, you might think about the teaching on non-self is often liberatory from the perspective of white trans practitioners.
- Put your second thinker into conversation with your first thinker. For example, put Zenju in conversation with Adahamh Roland Hoeltzel.
- Think about the common themes in their arguments. Which teachings do they similarly embrace?
- Think about the differences in their analyses. For example, how is the teaching on non-self often difficult for Black practitioners, as Zenju notes, but liberatory for white trans practitioners, as Hoeltzel describes?
- Conclude with a summary of these practitioners’ viewpoints on the topic you have chosen to investigate.

Late papers and Absences

- Every day (24-hour period) that a paper is late, the letter grade for the paper will be dropped by a third. (For example, from a B+ to a B).
- Absences must be accompanied by an official note. *If a student misses more than five classes during the semester, it is automatic grounds for failure of the course.* Individual conferences can be rescheduled without penalty, although students must meet with the professor to discuss the final research paper (and any other questions).
- Please make every effort to be on time to our virtual class. A pattern of late arrivals will result in reduction of the final grade.

WWC's Writing Studio

- Please keep in mind that I am willing to read drafts, and also that you may receive assistance in the Writing Studio (held online during the Covid-19 pandemic).
- Warren Wilson College's Writing Studio is a focused and productive place where any student may bring their assignments and projects, practice the craft of writing, and learn new writing techniques. The crew of writing assistants meet in individualized sessions with writers to start, complete, or review work.
- Students may find online resources and sign up for sessions here: <http://www.warren-wilson.edu/academics/writing-studio>

Title IX

Warren Wilson College is a community that respects the dignity of its members. The college is committed to maintaining a positive learning and working environment where diversity is honored and individuals are treated with respect. Due to Title IX requirements, all faculty members are required to report ANY knowledge of sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, or hate crimes related to sex, sexual orientation and/or gender. If you do not wish to have a report made, but do need to talk with someone about an incident that occurred involving sexual and/or relationship violence you can contact the following confidential resources:

- WWC Counseling Center
- Brian Ammons – WWC Chaplain
- Online biased-incident report www.warren-wilson.edu/student-grievance
- Asheville's Our Voice 24 hour crisis line 828-255-7576
- CGR/RISE Hotline – 828-337-3264