

**SYLLABUS FOR
“BUDDHIST HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, AND RACISM:
ZEN PERSPECTIVES AND BEYOND”**

January 27-March 24, 2021

Rev. Eric Daishin McCabe

Rev. Steve Kanji Ruhl

Required Reading List:

Black & Buddhist, edited by Pamela Ayo Yetunde and Cheryl A. Giles

How to Be an Antiracist, Ibram X. Kendi

American Sutra, Duncan Williams, prologue and chapters 1-5 (at minimum; the remaining chapters are recommended)

Supplemental Reading List (Optional and Recommended)

Radical Dharma, Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Lama Rod Owens, and Jasmine Syedullah

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

Taming the Ox: Buddhist Stories and Reflections on Politics, Race, Culture, and Spiritual Practice, Charles R. Johnson

Dharma Matters; Women, Race, and Tantra, Jan Willis

Required Papers: Five-page midterm paper integrating responses to readings, videos, class instruction and class sharing, due March 3.

-- For a two-credit course, 10-page final paper integrating responses to reading, videos, class instruction and class sharing throughout the course, due March 24. OR: For three credits, interview a sangha to study how they are addressing issues of racism as a group and submit a 10-page paper, incorporating the results of the interview as well as relevant lessons from the course. This should be a substantial paper with documentation.

Wednesday, January 27

Prior to this class: Begin reading *How to Be an Antiracist*, by Ibram X. Kendi, and begin thinking about the questions listed below, which will be discussed in class.

In class: Welcome and introductions.

Daishin and Kanji give overview of course and information regarding expectations for first assigned paper.

First round of group sharing: each class participant gives a personal history of encounters with race, approximately 20 minutes apiece (flexible depending on number of participants). What are your memories of racial messages that you received; what experiences -- at home, in school, in your community, in the nation, in the world -- shaped your sense of racial identity and your interactions with others; what has been your understanding and experience of racism; what brings you to this course?

Wednesday, February 3

Assignment for this class session: Finish reading up to Chapter 9 of *How to Be an Antiracist* and be prepared to discuss.

Watch the following videos (total viewing time 2.5 hours) and be prepared to discuss.

Historical perspectives on Black engagement with race in institutional white-supremacist America, from non-Buddhist Black spiritual leaders:

American Muslim leader Malcolm X (Malik el Shabazz) following his return from the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964 (15 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5aHDax9IWg>

Rev. Martin Luther King, Baptist minister and theologian, delivering his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in 1964 (12 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r98tT0j1a0>

Cambridge debate in 1965 between James Baldwin, former Pentecostalist preacher, noted author, and Civil Rights activist, and conservative writer William F. Buckley (59 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Tek9h3a5wQ>

Rev. Martin Luther King speaking on “The Other America” in 1967 (48 minutes):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJu_YDgw9rU

Ruby Sales, Episcopal theologian, Civil Rights activist, founder of SpiritHouse project, speaking in 2018 about her experiences in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960’s and about the current racial situation in America (20 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SfhKi24z-M>

In class: Second round of sharing personal histories of race (if needed).

-- Sharing responses to videos.

-- Daishin and Kanji, opening exploration and shared class discussion of issues raised in *How to Be an Antiracist*; personal responses to the book from class participants.

Wednesday, February 10

Assignment for this class: Finish reading *How to Be an Antiracist* and be prepared to discuss.

-- Read up to Chapter 4 of *Black & Buddhist*, edited by Pamela Ayo Yestunde and Cheryl A. Giles

In class: Continued discussion of personal responses to *How to Be an Antiracist*; begin discussion of *Black & Buddhist*.

Wednesday, February 17

Assignment for class: Finish reading *Black & Buddhist*.

In class: Guest Speaker: Prof. Cheryl Giles, Harvard Divinity School, co-editor, *Black & Buddhist* (please refer to Prof. Giles' bio in book).

Wednesday, February 24

Assignment for this class: Watch videos by Black American Buddhist teachers (total viewing time 1.5 hours) and be prepared to discuss:

Dr. Jan Willis, former Black Panther, current Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Wesleyan University professor and scholar, speaking on "Dharma and Activism" (approximately 40-minute talk with 20 minutes question-and-answer):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkQyrDW8zY8&t=2373s>

Rev. Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, Soto Zen priest; "Zenju's Path" (6 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TSSenvjSIw>

Rev. Zenju Earthlyn Manuel on "Embodied Enlightenment (5 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6t8kFEVZnDM>

Rev. Angel Kyudo Williams, Zen teacher, on "Radical Dharma" (19 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjm909wQFXk>

In class: Class discussion of videos.

-- Daishin and Kanji teaching on race and Zen Buddhist contexts for examining it: race as a genjokoan; Dogen's statement "to study the Way is to study the self; to study the self is to lose the self; to lose the self is to experience the ten thousand things of the universe" and its application to a racially constructed self in the social world of Relative phenomena and experience of no-self in Absolute Oneness; self and Other; systemic racism and the nature of suffering; awakening from a culture of white supremacy.

-- Processes of cultural assimilation related to Buddhist history and questions of appropriation.

Wednesday, March 3

Assignment for this class: Midterm paper due

In class: We will explore sectors of American Buddhism, such as Soka Gakkai, which tend to have higher levels of participation among Black Buddhists, and will look at programs, such as Spirit Rock's in the Theravada/Vipassana tradition, which host people of color retreats and trainings. In doing so, we will ask relevant questions and share our responses.

Group discussion: How is your sangha addressing issues of race? What is your sangha doing right, and what could it be doing better? What can you do personally?

Wednesday, March 10

Assignment for this class: Read prologue and chapters 1-5 of *American Sutra*, by Duncan Williams.

Read "What is the Sound of One Invisible Hand Clapping? Neoliberalism, the Invisibility of Asian and Asian American Buddhists, and Secular Mindfulness in Education," by Funie Hsu. (https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-44019-4_24)

In class: We will explore American Buddhism and Asian-Americans, including the tensions between predominantly white "convert Buddhists" and Asian "ethnic Buddhists." We will look at Buddhism's migration to the United States via Asians and Asian Americans, at the history of racial oppression in the US against Chinese and Japanese and other Asian immigrants – including the mass internments of Japanese-Americans in the US during World War Two – and

at the arrival of Asian Buddhist teachers in the US. We also will examine the dual thinking in American conscience between professing First Amendment religious freedom on the one hand, and assertions that conflate Christianity with what it means to be American on the other hand.

Wednesday, March 17

Assignment for class: Watch the video, “The Wellbriety Journey to Forgiveness,” about the genocide of Native American peoples, focusing especially on the boarding school experiences that indigenous children were forced into by the U.S. government. (1 hour 13 minutes)

<https://youtu.be/vZwF9NnQbWM>

In class: We will inquire into the growing relationship between Buddhism and the nation’s diverse Latinx communities, which currently comprise 12 percent of the American Buddhist population. We will look at the history of racism against Latinx people, and will consider the immigration issue in the context of Buddhist principles and values.

This session also will examine American Buddhism and race in regard to Native Americans. We will examine Zen practitioner, ecologist, and author Gary Snyder’s efforts to forge a synthesis of Buddhist and Native American spiritual wisdom; note Zen practitioner and author Peter Mattheiessen’s study of conflict in the Black Hills; will look at the Zen Peacemaker Order’s current work with the Oglala Lakota people at the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota; and will recognize connections between Buddhists and the Indian nations represented three years ago at the Standing Rock protests against the Dakota pipeline.

Guest speaker: Roshi Genro Gauntt, head teacher of the Hudson River Zen Center, Zen Peacemaker Order, discussing work with the Oglala Lakota people at the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. (Roshi Genro has spent 22 years living and working with the Lakota. He participated at the Standing Rock protests, has been adopted by more than one Lakota family -- including by a medicine man -- has studied Indian spirituality deeply, has attended numerous ceremonies including Sun Dance, and serves as the Zen Peacemaker leader for retreats with the Lakota.)

Wednesday, March 24

Assignment for this class: Final papers due.

In class: Final reflections and group sharing.