

## **Tracing the Arc of the Universe: Oppression, Change and Resistance in Unitarian Universalism**

**Mondays, 2:10pm - 5:00pm**

***Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris***

***DRAFT Syllabus***

### **Class overview**

This course will be a journey into the history of oppression in our liberal religious faith, using race as a key lens. As religious liberals, we have often been among the first to begin to extend rights to groups which have been historically disenfranchised, disempowered or oppressed. And yet, we have also faced serious set-backs when our own perceptions of our place in the religious spectrum have kept us from undertaking the real change needed to transform culture, hearts and institutions. Through selective study of the journeys of women, people of color/Latina/o/Hispanic peoples, those with marginalized sexual orientations or gender identities, and disabled persons, participants will reflect on the nature of social change and develop tools for effective advocacy.

### **Learning Objectives**

- To better understand our shared history as Unitarian Universalists, especially as it relates to its interactions with historically marginalized groups.
- To reflect on the role of the religious leader in social change and cultural transformation.
- To begin to explore the theological resources for acting as an agent of change.

### **Course Requirements**

- Regular attendance and participation in class—please let Leslie know if you will not be present as the generative dialogue of the class is part of the learning environment.
- Completion of weekly reflection papers of no more than 500 words on the readings assigned (you may skip this assignment for two weeks total.)
- Preparation and delivery of a presentation on one of the social justice issues.
- Completion of a statement (no longer than 5 pages) which summarizes your theology and its relationship to being an agent for expanding social justice and equity.
- Completion of a final project (see below)

### **Required Texts**

- Victor Carpenter, *The Long Challenge: The Empowerment Controversy (1967-1977)*, Chicago: Meadville-Lombard Press, 2004, ISBN : 978-0-97024-795-7.
- Richard S. Gilbert, *The Prophetic Imperative: Social Gospel In Theory and Practice*, second edition, Skinner House, 2001. ISBN: 978-1-55896-411-2.
- Mark D. Morrison-Reed, *Black Pioneers in a White Denomination, third edition*, Skinner House, 1994. ISBN: 978-1-55896-250-7.
- Paul Razor, *Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Skinner House, 2005. ISBN-13: 978-1-55896-484-6
- Assigned on-line readings and excerpts and articles (available in PDF format.)

### **Recommended Text**

- *The Arc of the Universe is Long: Unitarian Universalism, Anti-racism and the Journey from Calgary.* Leslie Takahashi Morris, Chip Roush, Leon Spencer, Skinner House 2009. ISBN: 978- 1-55896-548-5

**Final Project:** For the final project, students will develop a practical tool for congregational or community life that can build on the knowledge they have gained in the class. Examples would be a sermon series on the issues discussed in the class; a prospectus for and sample session for an adult religious education class to touch on themes of faith and justice; a plan for a public observance that would illustrate one of the themes of the class; a public school curriculum about identity, *etcetera*. Project ideas must be approved by the instructor by March 28<sup>th</sup>. Successful completion of the project will include 1) development of initial idea and approval, 2) illustration of the idea with bibliography of sources used, and 3) presentation to the class of some idea of the project. All projects must include a statement of your personal theology as it relates to social change and justice work.

## **Section I: Identity, Faith and Relationship**

*January 31: Introduction to Ourselves and to the Course/Course Expectations/ Social Justice and Liberal Religious Theology*

Readings:

- Sharon Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk (excerpts)*.
- Henry Nelson Weiman, *The Source of Human Good (excerpts)*
- Dan McKanan, “Prophetic Religion in America: Tracing the Liberal Contribution” prepared for Collegium 2007.
- W.R. Jones, “Process Theology: Guardian of the Oppressor or Goad to the Oppressed?”

*February 7 Identity and Faith.*

Readings:

- Richard Gilbert, *The Prophetic Imperative*
- Jack Mendelssohn, *Channing: The Reluctant Radical* (excerpt)
- Richard Wilson Boynton, “Unitarianism and Social Change” Berry Street lecture, 1919, available at <http://www.olduuma.org/BerryStreet/Essays/BSE1919.html>.
- Qiyamah Rahman, “Testifying: Invoking the Lives and Voices of African American Universalists, Unitarians and Unitarian Universalist Women,” Paper in Progress (presented at Collegium, 2008 (excerpts)).
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Key Figures:

- Frances Ellen Watkins Harper
- William Ellery Channing

## Section II: Learning From Our Past with Race and Class As the Variables

*February 14 Settlement, Rights and Education*

Readings:

- Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism*, UNC Press, 2002 (excerpts)
- Gary Kowalski, "Torturing Our History" in *Tikkun Magazine*, September-October 2008, available at <http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/Kowalski-torturing-our-history>.
- Dictionary of UU Biography (selected sites)

Key Figures:

- Thomas Jefferson/Sally Hemmings
- John Adams
- Adin Ballou
- Bronson Alcott

*February 21 –No Class*

*February 28: Abolition and slavery*

Readings:

- Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism*, UNC Press, 2002 (excerpts)
- David Bryce Hastings, "Looking Back: Unitarianism, Slavery and Civil War (sermon delivered Feb 5. 2006.)" [http://www.westchesteruu.org/sermons/ser%202006\\_0205%20Looking%20Back%20-%20Unitarianism,%20Slavery%20and%20Civil%20War.htm](http://www.westchesteruu.org/sermons/ser%202006_0205%20Looking%20Back%20-%20Unitarianism,%20Slavery%20and%20Civil%20War.htm)
- "Selected Poetry of Frances Ellen Watkins (1825-1911)." *Representative Poetry Online*. <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poet/344.html>.

Key Figures:

- Theodore Parker
- Daniel and Mary Livermore
- Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

*March 7: Civil Rights and the Empowerment Controversies*

Readings:

- Mark Morrison Reed, *Black Pioneers in a White Denomination*.
- Richard D. Leonard, "The view from the balcony: A witness's diary captures the torment and magic of James Reeb's eulogy". May/June 2001 issue *UU World* available at <http://www.uuworld.org/spirit/articles/2358.shtml>

- Joanne Gionnino, “Biography of Viola Luizzo,” Dictionary of Unitarian Universalist Biography available at <http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/violaliuzzo.html>
- Herbert Vetter, Notable Unitarian Universalists, excerpts (including p. 108-109)

Key Figures:

- James Reeb
- Viola Luizzo
- Donald Herrington

*March 14: The Legacy of the Empowerment Controversies*

Readings:

- Unitarian Universalist Association Commission on Appraisal, *Quest for Racial Justice: One Denomination’s Quest for Racial Justice*, 1983, excerpts
- Leslie Takahashi Morris, Chip Roush and Leon Spencer, *Arc of the Universe is Long* (excerpts)

Key Figures:

- Mark Morrison-Reed
- Mel Hoover
- John Buehrens

*March 21 --No Class*

*March 28: Empowerment Controversies and Anti-Racism*

Reading:

- Unitarian Universalist Association Commission on Appraisal, *Quest for Racial Justice: One Denomination’s Quest for Racial Justice*, 1983, excerpts
- Victor Carpenter, *The Long Challenge: The Empowerment Controversy (1967-1977)*
- Excerpts from *The Arc of the Universe is Long*

Key Figures:

- Donald Harrington
- Mel Hoover
- Thandeka
- Jose Ballester

### Section III: **Creating the Culture of Welcoming: Other Lessons of History**

*April 4: : The Rights of the Mentally Ill*

Reading:

- Dorothea Dix, Dictionary of Unitarian Universalist Biography
- Barbara Myers, “Relationship Between Unitarian Universalism and Mental Health” available at <http://www.mpuuc.org/mentalhealth/uufaith.html>

Key Figures:

- Dorothea Dix

*April 11: Sexual Orientation and the Gender Spectrum.*

Reading:

- Mel Harkrader Pine, “The Gay Years,” A sermon delivered at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Loudon, October 11, 2003, <http://www.uuloudoun.org/GayYears.html>
- “History of Unitarian Universalist Involvement in and Support of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Issues,” <http://www.uua.org/members/justicediversity/bisexualgay/20962.shtml>

Key Figures

- Douglas Morgan Strong
- Barbara Pescan
- Mark Mosher DeWolfe
- Scott Alexander

### Section IV: **Special Challenges for Liberal Religion**

*April 18: Engagement with Our Ideals: Democracy, Consensus and Other Liberal Traps*

Reading:

- Paul Razor, *Faith Without Certainty*
- James Luther Adams, “The Changing Reputation of Human Nature,” Address before the Conference at Berry Street, 1941, available at <http://www.olduuma.org/BerryStreet/Essays/BSE1941.htm>
- Jacob Trapp, “Democracy as Modern Religion,” Conference at Berry Street, 1942.

*April 24—No Class*

*May 2 Special Challenges (cont)/Project Presentations*

May 9                      *Project presentations*

May 16                     *Project presentation*

### *About the Instructor*

*Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris has been a Unitarian Universalist for more than 20 years, coming to the faith as a young adult. She was a founding member of the Thomas Jefferson District Anti-Racism Transformation Team, was on the Eno River UU Fellowship congregational anti-racism team, and served as moderator for All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church in Durham, NC, an intentionally multicultural anti-racist congregation. Her consultative work has included documenting resources for multiracial families/families of color within the UUA and she helped host a conference for multiracial families as part of the TJD Anti-Racism Conference in 2006. Ordained in 2004, she has been active in efforts to involve congregations in advocacy for the rights of bisexual, lesbian, gay and transgendered people. She helped organize the UU response to a constitutional marriage amendment banning same-sex partnerships or marriages when this issue arose in Virginia and also aided the efforts in California's Contra Costa County. She is the author, with Rev. Chip Roush and Dr. Leon Spencer, of a book examining the UUA's efforts to address racism since the 1992 General Assembly in Calgary passed a resolution calling for the UUA to be racially and culturally diverse. The book was published in summer of 2009 by Skinner House. She has served on the steering committees for the Asian Pacific Islander Caucus of DRUUMM and as part of the Multiracial Caucus and currently serves as the co-president of DRUUMM, on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Task Force of the UUA and as affiliated faculty with Meadville-Lombard Theological School. She has previously taught through the summer school program of at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, through the Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy at Duke University, and through the adult religious education programs of five congregations.*