

Fall 2025

Religion 100: Religion, Race, and Social Justice

Tuesday & Thursday, 9:30 AM – 10:50 AM

Eggers 010

Instructor

Rev. Dr. Alan Rudnick

arudnick@syr.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays 11-12 PM (Hall of Languages 501C) or by appointment via email

Teaching Assistants

Rachel Carpenter - rkcarmen@syr.edu

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TA Office Hours: By appointment

Overview

REL100 invites us into a continued, honest, and, at times, uncomfortable discussion about three of the most influential forces determining human history and modern life. Religion, race, and social justice are not merely academic topics—they are lived realities. These topics shape the stories we tell, the laws we follow, the communities we belong to, and the dreams we have for what the world should be. To study these topics together is to take seriously the fact that none of them exists in isolation. Religion is often a place where questions of race and justice are confronted—or ignored. Race has been interpreted, resisted, and reinforced through religious ideas and organizations. Justice is pursued, discussed, and sometimes distorted in religious settings, and it remains a disputed idea in public life.

This class will ask us to think profoundly and critically about the connections of these three domains—not as intellectual categories, but as forces that touch our identities, communities, and moral responsibilities. There are key questions that will direct us: How have religious traditions influenced racial categories and hierarchies? How have faith communities challenged injustice and fueled social transformation? How do contemporary justice movements engage with, reject, or reimagine religious frameworks?

We will practice respectful dialogue, which does not mean avoiding disagreement—it means engaging differences with thoughtful responses and mutual respect. This class is a *brave space* where we can be challenged and where we pledge to honest conversation. Uneasiness is not a hindrance to learning; it can be an emblem that learning is happening.

Our approach will be interdisciplinary, drawing on history, theology, sociology, cultural studies, and ethics. We will engage with texts, historical accounts, personal narratives, legal documents, music, and art. This variety will allow us to explore the topic from multiple perspectives and entry points.

Learning in this class is a shared journey. We each bring our backgrounds and experiences, which will enrich our conversations. We will encounter stimulating material and differing viewpoints. Our goal is not uniform accord, but a profound understanding through respectful, engaged dialogue. This course is designed for you to learn, reflect, respond, reflect some more, think some more, dialogue, and then reflect yet again.

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Synthesize interdisciplinary perspectives on race, religion, and social justice and analyze the complex relationship between religion and social justice movements.
2. Integrate ethical reasoning and cultural competency to engage respectfully with diverse religious and racial identities in academic and community contexts.
3. Apply historical and theological analysis to evaluate the role of religion in both reinforcing and addressing systems of racial oppression.
4. Articulate informed perspectives on current social justice movements, integrating insights from religious ethics and social justice theory.
5. Reflect critically on personal identity, privilege, and bias to foster inclusive dialogue and equitable action within community and professional environments.

Attendance Policy

This course is a class where attendance is essential! Much of the learning comes from lectures, discussions, reflection, dialogue, and the use of in-class media. This is not a class that you do not show up for, memorize material from a textbook, and pass an exam. Participation and your presence are expected in small, medium, and large group environments. If you have more than two unexcused absences, you will not receive credit for participation. Excused absences are allowed due to:

1. Illness – If you have an illness that impacts you and will impact others, please stay in bed. You must inform one of the TAs of your illness before class. See page one for contact information for the TAs to receive an excused absence.
2. Family emergency – If there is a death, hospitalization, accident, or major calamity that requires your attention, you must contact one of the TAs before class starts on Tuesday or Thursday to receive an excused absence.

3. NCAA athletic game or travel. You must contact a TA before missing the class to receive an excused absence.
4. Religious obligation. See page 11, “Religious Observance.”

An accumulation of significant excused or unexcused absences may require you to meet with me or the TAs.

Communication

If you need to communicate with me or the teaching assistants, students must use the email addresses listed on page one. Please do not use Blackboard to communicate. Generally, I or the TAs can respond within 24 hours of your email. For weekend communication, it may take me or the TAs longer to respond. If you have an issue, question, or concern, first communicate with the teaching assistants, then the professor.

Dialogue and Conversation

We will cover and discuss heavy topics. We come from different faiths, no faith, differing backgrounds, diverse perspectives, and experiences. Our goal is to listen, contemplate, and understand. Judging one another does not get us anywhere near a beloved community. We must¹:

- Listen actively... pay attention to what [someone is] saying and what reasoning they give.
- Show respect to all members of the conversation. For instance, try to understand their point of view. Assume they are acting in good faith, even if you disagree with them. If you disagree, explain why you disagree with a claim/view, but don't attack the person.
- Help create an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their perspectives.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Don't be afraid to change your views.

Since the nature of the topics covered in this class is weighty, the course readings or class discussions may generate intellectual and emotional discomfort. These responses are natural parts of intellectual growth. If, however, your emotional response becomes acute

¹ Engaging in Respectful Dialogue. Clarkson University. <https://sites.clarkson.edu/storiesfromthecircle/engaging-in-respectful-dialogue/> (Accessed August 13, 2025).

psychological distress, please communicate with me. I invite you to contact me if you have concerns in this regard.

Course Readings and Assignments

Required Texts

- *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, Robert P. Jones (2020).
- *Four Pivots: Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves*, Shawn A. Ginwright. (2022)
- *The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice: Black Lives, Healing, and US Social Transformation*, Fania E. Davis (2019).
- Readings/media listed in the syllabus each Tuesday and Thursday are to be read **BEFORE** class.

Supplemental Material

- All supplemental text will be available via an internet link on this syllabus or Blackboard.

Assignments

For more understanding of what is expected of undergraduate writing, please see:

<https://library.sacredheart.edu/c.php?g=29803&p=185910>. All written assessments must be (1) 12-point font in Times New Roman or Arial, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and (2) citations: Chicago style, with notes and bibliography ONLY. Please visit the writing center for help on assignments: <https://artsandsciences.syracuse.edu/writing-center/>

- 10% - Participation – More than two unexcused absences result in getting zero points for participation. Your presence is greatly needed.
- 20% - Two Reflection papers – 2 pages
 - Reflection #1 – Reflection on a topic we've covered in class. What are your views? What have you learned? What do you struggle with in the subject of religion, race, and/or religion and justice? What is a reading or readings, class, or discussion that struck you as important? Why? What have your in-class dialogues yielded? **Due September 30.**
 - Reflection #2 – Given what you have learned in class so far, what will you do differently because of learning about religion, race, and justice? Have your views changed? Stayed the same? Why? What have your in-class dialogues yielded? How will you incorporate what you have learned in this class into your studies, life, and goals? **Due November 13.**

- 30% - Mid-Term Paper. **Due October 16.** Experience reflections from an interview of a faith leader or a site visit to a non-profit/group that addresses issues of social or societal challenges. 3-4 pages.
 - Option #1 - Interview a faith leader from a different faith tradition that is not your own or is entirely different from your experience. Who are they? What are the religion's beliefs, practices, and primary faith focus? How do they worship? How does the faith group address issues of religion, race, and social justice? What does social justice look like to them? Elaborate on the work the organization does in the field of religion, race, and/or social justice.
 - Option #2 – Interview a leader or representative from an organization that is involved with religion and justice, social justice, or race and religion— organizations like [InterFaith Works](#), peace organizations, campus groups, churches, synagogues, or mosques. What does the group or organization do and why? Who do they serve, and why? How do they address religion, race, and social justice? Give an example, or examples, of the work the leader or representative does in the area of religion, race, and/or social justice?
- 40% - Final paper or project. There are three options:
 1. Interact with a topic, question, problem, or challenge regarding religion, race, and social justice from our required texts, with cited material from primary sources. What is the question, problem, or challenge, and what approaches can be used to address the question, problem, or challenge? Use at least 10 primary sources (books, articles, journals, and podcasts” – and not just internet links (books online do not count as an “internet link”). Sources can be books and articles from this course. 5-7 pages.
 2. Profile a current or historic leader or individual whom we have covered in this course (or who we haven't covered in this course). How did or do they contribute to the cause of social justice? What's their journey? What is the social justice movement's journey? What did they struggle with in their journey? What is your connection to the person and why? Use at least 10 primary sources (and not just internet links – books, journals, or articles online do not count as an internet link). Online articles or journals must be from a news agency, a credible organization, or a research center. Sources can be books and articles from this course. 5-7 pages. You must submit a bibliography.
 3. Create a 15-20 minute video recording (like a Zoom or Google Meet) of a presentation of one of the above final paper ideas and submit a bibliography. Use of slides, graphs, pictures, timelines, and key details is what I am looking for. Slides and facts must be annotated. Use at least 10 primary sources (and not just internet links – online books, journals, or articles online do not count as an

internet link). Sources can be books and articles from this course. Must submit a bibliography and video. **Due December 11 @ 2:45 PM.**

- Late Assignments – All assignments are due at the start of class on Tuesday or Thursday. Your final grade will drop one letter grade for each day your assignments are late. If you submit an assignment after the beginning of Tuesday or Thursday's class, it will be considered late. Please contact me regarding late assignments.
- Submissions – Can be submitted via Blackboard or paper copy.

Grading

For the sake of precision and clarity, the written work will be graded as follows:

A-range: Outstandingly strong work; a creative thesis, well-supported by evidence; insightful analysis; solid transitions; clear writing; few, if any, issues with style, grammar, or citations.

B-range: Detailed work; a robust thesis not sufficiently supported by evidence or an overly comprehensive thesis adequately supported by evidence; good analysis; functional prose; some problems with style, grammar, or citations.

C-range: Satisfactory work; a wide thesis; vague evidence; dependence on generalizations rather than analysis; meager prose; poor grammar, style, or citations.

D and F-range: Unreadable work; misses the mark to meet the requirements of the project or assignment.

Letter Grade	Percentage	GPA
A	94-100	4.00
A-	90-93	3.40
B+	87-89	3.33
B	83-86	3.00
B-	80-82	2.66
C+	77-79	2.33
C	73-77	2.00
C-	70-72	1.66
D	60-69	1.00
F	< 60	0.00

Calendar and Assignments

Week	DATE / Section	TOPIC	TO BE READ BEFORE CLASS
		Understanding Religion in America	

Week 1	Tuesday, August 26	Introduction, syllabus, expectations	
Week 1	Thursday, August 28	Why Religion, Race, and Social Justice?	
Week 2	Tuesday, September 2:	Religion and Race in Christian American History and Culture Part 1	<i>White Too Long</i> , ch. 1
Week 2	Thursday, September 4	Religion and Race in Christian American History and culture Part 2	<i>White Too Long</i> , ch.2
Week 3	Tuesday, September 9	Islam in America	https://www.justiceforall.org/resources/reports/american-muslims-2025-a-brief-profile/
Week 3	Tuesday, September 11	Judaism in America	https://ajpp.brandeis.edu/us_jewish_population_2020
		Myths and Realities in Religion and Race in America	
Week 4	Tuesday, September 15:	The Myth of the Christian Nation?	Hughes, Richard T., Christina Littlefield, and Randall Balmer. "EVALUATING THE CASE for a Christian America." In <i>Christian America and the Kingdom of God: White Christian Nationalism from the Puritans through January 6, 2021</i> , 11–21. University of Illinois Press, 2025. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jj.22679642.7 .
Week 4	Thursday, September 18	The Myth of Free Nation?	<i>White Too Long</i> , ch.3
Week 5	Tuesday, September 23	The Myth of Post-Racial?	<i>White Too Long</i> , ch.4
Week 5	Thursday, September 25	The Myth of Non-Bias?	<i>Four Pivots</i> , introduction
Week 6	Tuesday, September 30	The Myth of Capitalism and Race?	First Reflection PAPER DUE - <i>Four Pivots</i> , ch.1 - <i>White Too Long</i> , Ch. 5
		Theories of Justice: Is it Just?	
Week 6	Thursday, October 2:	Is It Just? Utilitarianism is The Answer?	<i>Four Pivots</i> , ch. 2

Week 7	Tuesday, October 7	Is it Just? An Entitlement Alternative and a Communitarian Rebuttal	<i>Four Pivots</i> , ch. 3
Week 7	Thursday, October 9	Is it Just? A Pope and a Protestant Walk into a Pub: Francis and Niebuhr	Francis: https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2024-09/pope-francis-popular-movements-social-economic-justice.html Niebuhr: https://www.nas.org/academic-questions/28/3/democracy-and-sin-doing-justice-to-reinhold-niebuhr
Week 8	Tuesday, October 14		NO CLASS, FALL BREAK
Week 8	Thursday, October 16	Is It Just? A Liberation Challenge and Womanist Perspective	Mid-term paper DUE at the start of class Read: https://reflections.yale.edu/article/god-and-money-turning-tables/what-s-liberation-got-do-it Read: https://sojo.net/articles/liberating-theology-transformed-my-understanding-god
Week 9	Tuesday, October 21	Is “God” Wrong? The Problem of Evil and Suffering	
Week 9	Thursday, October 23	The Challenge of the Word “Race”	<i>Four Pivots</i> , ch. 4
		Religion, Race, and Social Justice in Action	
Week 10	Tuesday, October 28	South Africa: A Long Night’s Journey Into Day (part 1)	<i>Four Pivots</i> , ch.7
Week 10	Thursday, October 30	South Africa: A Long Night’s Journey Into Day (part 2)	- <i>Four Pivots</i> , ch. 8 - <i>Race and Restorative Justice</i> , pg.1-29
Week 11	Tuesday, November 4	American Civil Rights Movement (part 1)	MLK: Letter from the Birmingham Jail https://minio.la.utexas.edu/webeditor-files/coretexts/pdf/1963_mlk_letter.pdf
Week 11	Thursday, November 6	American Civil Rights Movement (part 2)	<i>White Too Long</i> , ch. 5
Week 12	Tuesday, November 11	Seeking Peace in The Middle East – Is It Possible?	Podcast: https://open.spotify.com/episode/6uHTK0oDRkodUBcJj15fT?si=Hr_9S1FnRMmpgl0jdTf4Yg
Week 12	Thursday, November 13	The Environment, Native Americans, and the Land	Second Reflection Paper Due
Week 13	Tuesday, November 18	Gangs, Poverty, and Homeboys in LA	- <i>Four Pivots</i> , ch. 5 & 6 - <i>Race and Restorative Justice</i> , pg.58-72
Week 13	Thursday, November 20	The Black Church and BLM	<i>Four Pivots</i> , ch.9 & 10
		Conclusion	
Week 14	Tuesday, November 25		NO CLASS, Thanksgiving Break

Week 14	Thursday November 27		NO CLASS, Thanksgiving Break
Week 15	Tuesday, December 2	Can There Be Social Justice?	- <i>White Too Long</i> , ch. 6 - <i>Race and Restorative Justice</i> , pg. 30-57
Week 15	Thursday, December 4	Can There Be Forgiveness in Social Justice?	<i>Four Pivots</i> , ch.11 & 12
Week 16	Tuesday, December 9	Can There Be Reconciliation? LAST CLASS	- <i>White Too Long</i> , ch. 7 & "Afterward" - <i>Race and Restorative Justice</i> , pg.73-87
Week 16	Thursday, December 11		Final paper or project due by 2:45 PM.

Technology Use

The use of laptop computers or tablets is encouraged to take notes in class, consult digital copies of readings as necessary, and consult discussion paragraphs. Use of technology for email, texting, or non-class-related purposes, however, is not permitted. Students engaged in these activities may have electronic devices confiscated until the end of class and/or receive deductions to their class participation grade.

All generative-AI tools are prohibited in this course because their use inhibits achievement of the course learning objectives. This policy applies to all stages of project and writing processes including researching, brainstorming, outlining, organizing, and polishing. Do not use Generative-AI tools to create any content (i.e., images and video, audio, text, code, etc.).

Using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course material (e.g., Chegg, Course Hero) to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others and present the work as your own violates academic integrity expectations in this course and may be classified as a Level 3 violation, resulting in suspension or expulsion from Syracuse University.

This class will use the Blackboard Learning Management to house the syllabus, course content, links to external course materials, assignments, quizzes, exams, feedback, and grades. Due dates and times in Blackboard are stored in Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) and displayed for each user based on the time zone setting of their computer and data from their internet browser. The system will always display the time zone being used. If an instructor sets a due date of 11pm Eastern time, a student in the Pacific time zone will see a due date of 8pm.

Syracuse University has established email as a primary vehicle for official communication with students, faculty, and staff. Emergency notifications, educational dialog, research, and general business correspondence are all consistently enhanced in institutions of higher learning where email policies exist and are supported by procedures, practice, and culture.

Information about Blackboard is available on [Answers Blackboard](#); alternatively, you can contact Information Technology Services by sending an email to help@syr.edu, calling 315.443.2677, or in-person at the ITS Service Center, located at 1-227 CST in the Life Sciences Complex. Business hours for the Service Center can be found on the [ITS website](#).

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Syracuse University Policies

Federal and state law, and University policy prohibit discrimination and harassment based on sex or gender (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, stalking, and sexual exploitation). If a student has been impacted by any prohibited behavior based on sex or gender, they can obtain confidential counseling support, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, from the [Sexual and Relationship Violence Response Team](#) at the Counseling Center (315-443-8000, Barnes Center at The Arch, 150 Sims Drive, Syracuse, New York 13244). Incidents of sexual or relationship violence or harassment can be reported to the University's Title IX Coordinators (Sheila Johnson Willis, Chief Equal Opportunity Officer and Title IX Officer for Faculty and Staff, 315-443-4018, equalopp@syr.edu or Pamela Peter, Director/Coordinator of Student Title IX Case Management, 315-443-0211, titleix@syr.edu). Reports to law enforcement can be made to the University's Department of Public Safety (315-443-2224, 005 Sims Hall), the Syracuse Police Department (511 South State Street, Syracuse, New York, 911 in case of emergency or 315-435-3016 to speak with the Abused Persons Unit), or the State Police (Campus Sexual Assault Victims Unit, 844-845-7269). I will seek to keep information you share with me private to the greatest extent possible, but as a professor I have mandatory reporting responsibilities to share information regarding sexual misconduct, relationship violence, stalking, harassment, and crimes I learn about with the University's Title IX Officer to help make our campus a safer place for all and to ensure you have access to available resources.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) sets forth requirements regarding the privacy of student records. FERPA governs both the access to and release of those records, known as education records, and the information they contain. Under FERPA, faculty have a legal responsibility to protect the confidentiality of student records. For additional information about FERPA and Syracuse University's FERPA policy, see [Compliance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act](#) or contact the Office of the Registrar (315.443.2422).

Religious Observances

Syracuse University's religious observances policy, found at <https://policies.syr.edu/policies/university-governance-ethics-integrity-and-legal-compliance/religious-observances-policy/> recognizes the diversity of faiths represented in the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students should have an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors no later than the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes and by the submission deadline for flexibility formatted classes. Student deadlines are posted in MySlice under Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances/Add a Notification.

Academic Integrity

As a pre-eminent and inclusive student-focused research institution, Syracuse University considers academic integrity at the forefront of learning, serving as a core value and guiding pillar of education. Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy provides students with the necessary guidelines to complete academic work with integrity throughout their studies. Students are required to uphold both course-specific and university-wide academic integrity expectations such as crediting your sources, doing your own work, communicating honestly, and supporting academic integrity. The full [Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy](#) can be viewed by visiting the [Syracuse University Policies website](#).

Upholding Academic Integrity includes the protection of faculty's intellectual property. Students should not upload, distribute, or share instructors' course materials, including presentations, assignments, exams, or other evaluative materials without permission. Using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course material (e.g., Chegg, Course Hero) to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others, which are then presented as your own violates academic integrity expectations in this course and may be classified as a Level 3 violation. All academic integrity expectations that apply to in-person assignments, quizzes, and exams also apply online.

Students found in violation of the policy are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered. Students may not drop or withdraw from courses in which they face a suspected violation. Any established violation in this course may result in course failure regardless of violation level.

Disability and Accommodations Information

Syracuse University values access and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course

that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to contact me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be necessary to ensure equitable access, and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-related accommodations or register with CDR, please visit [Center for Disability Resources](#). Please call (315) 443-4498 or email CDRspecialist@syr.edu for more detailed information.

CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations are generally not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to initiate this process.