



# California Institute of Integral Studies

## **SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM & TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL CHANGE**

PARW 6835, 3 units  
Spring 2020

**Alka Arora, PhD**  
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### **Teaching assistant:**

Kimberly Davis, kdavis@mymail.ciis.edu

### **Date and Time:**

January 25 & 26: 10am-6pm, 1453 Mission Street, Room 306

Feb 5-May 5: Online via Canvas

### **Office hours:**

Phone/Zoom: Friday afternoons

In-person: Tuesdays after 11:30

Appointments required

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will explore how our connection to embodied, spiritual wisdom can inform our efforts to create a more socially just and ecologically healthy world. Feminist/womanist analyses of gender, power, and social change will be integrated with insights from diverse spiritual and social justice traditions. While drawing inspiration from social change movements and leaders of the past, we will also explore the need to develop new strategies and visions to meet the challenges of our current historical moment. In this highly participatory class, students will be encouraged to raise questions and issues drawn from their own personal, professional, and activist experiences.

### **Questions explored in this course include:**

- What is the relationship between spirituality and activism?
- What role can/does spirituality play in activist movements?
- What roles do anger, love, hope and forgiveness play in feminist/womanist and other social movements?
- Can healing come from activism?
- How can we reconcile identity politics and oppositional struggles with a sense of the unitive dimension of humanity?
- What new tools and strategies do we need to develop?

- How can spiritual activism help us deal with some of the gravest challenges of our time, such as widespread poverty, sexual violence and sex trafficking, terrorism, and ecological destruction?

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Articulate the relationship between personal, social, and global transformation.
2. Analyze the role of nonviolence and spiritual activism in major social movements historically and cross-culturally.
3. Articulate a complex understanding of power, privilege, and oppression as well as of transformation and healing.
4. Create and present a community-based spiritual activism project that draws upon multiple ways of knowing.
5. Demonstrate effective writing, media, and presentation skills.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Fernandes, Leela. *Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-Violence, Social Justice and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2003.

Menakem, Resmaa. *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies*. Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017.

Mitchell, Sherri. *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2018.

Films to rent (\$2-\$4 each):

*Pray the Devil Back to Hell*

*A Prayer for Compassion*

Other assigned videos and podcasts are free.

## IMPORTANT DATES

- **Jan 20:** Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- **Jan 21-26:** Women's Spirituality Intensive
- **Jan 27-Feb 4** – class break (to help you recover from Intensive)
- **Feb 19** - Project outline due
- **Feb 17** - Presidents' Day (CIIS is closed)
- **March 20** - Midterm papers due
- **March 23-27** - Spring Break

- **May 5** – Course ends
- **May 8** – Final papers due
- **May 28** – Grades submitted
- For add'l dates (such as add/drop deadlines, etc, visit: <https://www.ciis.edu/academics/academic-calendar>)

## ASSIGNMENTS

### 1. **Active Participation and Attendance, Ongoing (25%)**

Your participation grade for the Intensive will be based on showing up on time and being prepared for class, sharing the class space equitably, and demonstrating effective listening and dialogue skills.

For the online portion of the class, you will be required to post at least twice on Canvas during each “posting week” in order to receive attendance credit; these posts should be spread out throughout the week. **Posts should be roughly between 100-300 words.**

The posting week begins on Wednesday and ends on Tuesday. Posts that are up to a week late will be marked down; posts later than that will not count and you will be marked absent for that module. Please note that per CIIS policy, you cannot pass a course if you are absent for more than 1/5 of the class sessions, regardless of the reason for your absences. The quality of your Canvas posts will also be assessed; more details about this will be posted on Canvas.

There will also be 2-3 large group web-conferences offered during the semester; you are required to attend at least one of these.

### 2. **Spiritual Activism Oral Reflection, Due 1/25 (5%)**

In preparation for our classroom discussion on Jan 25, please select one quotation from the texts (either one sentence or a short paragraph). During class, each student will be asked to speak for about 3-5 minutes about the quotation and about what the term "spiritual activism" means to them. If desired, you can also bring in a visual image (e.g., drawing or collage) to support your reflection.

You are also invited to bring the picture of a spiritual activist who inspires you - this could be either a historically significant person or an "ordinary" person whom you might know personally.

### 3. **Video Dialogue & Discussion Leadership (15%), Sign up for one module**

For each online module, two students will sign up to work together to offer a 10-15 minute video reflection on the lecture and texts. You should reference at least two of the texts during your dialogue. You are also encouraged to start your presentation with a short grounding exercise, meditation, or creative piece.

These videos will help frame the large-group discussion for the given week. Respondents should aim to have their video responses uploaded prior to the start of the class week.

#### 4. **Midterm Paper, Due March 19th (15%)**

##### **MA Students**

*Choose one:*

**Reflective Paper.** Write a 5-page reflection on what you've learned in the course thus far. Reference at least four texts.

**Op-Ed.** "The purpose of an Op-Ed is to sway public opinion and change minds using convincing argument and presenting it in a concise, readable way." (source: [https://onlineteaching.kent.edu/library/online\\_assignments/OpEd\\_Handout.pdf](https://onlineteaching.kent.edu/library/online_assignments/OpEd_Handout.pdf))

Your op-ed should be 700-1200 words, which is about 2 ½ - 4 pages. Reference at least two course texts. This assignment is fewer pages than the reflective paper, but requires you to develop and sustain a focused argument.

**Thesis-Driven paper.** See PhD section

##### **PhD Students**

Write a 5-6 page critical analysis of one of the themes covered so far in the semester (e.g. ecofeminism, indigenous activism, non-violent action, etc). Your paper should be centered around an original thesis statement and incorporate at least four texts.

#### 5. **Spiritual Activism Project & Paper (40%)**

Outline due **Feb 19**; Synopsis due **May 1**; Final paper due **May 11**

You will apply the theories that we learn about this semester by crafting and engaging in a community-based spiritual activism project. You can do a group project if desired, though papers should be written individually. Your project should in some way integrate spirituality (broadly defined) and social or ecological change. It should also touch upon at least one of the themes discussed in the course. Sample projects:

- Organizing and facilitating a discussion on systemic racism with your family or spiritual community.
- Committing to a new ecological practice (e.g. composting, eating less meat) while deepening your spiritual connection to the natural world via hikes.

Your project might involve organizing a significant, one-time event; facilitating a series of smaller events; or committing to a shift in your daily life. If you are already very involved with a spiritual practice, you are encouraged to become more socially or politically engaged. On the other hand, if you are already involved with social activism, you might choose instead to bring more of a spiritual consciousness to your efforts.

**Your final paper** will consist of an in-depth analysis of your spiritual activism project.

This will include the history of your chosen project, your connection to the community that you are engaging with, and a reflection on any challenges and opportunities that

arose throughout the course of your project. Your paper should also integrate pertinent readings, theories, and strategies we have covered in class (reference at least four texts). You are also encouraged to integrate relevant outside research. PhD students must also integrate at least one book or journal article not covered in class.

Papers should be 8-10 pages for MA students and 10-12 pages for PhD students. Additional paper guidelines will be posted on Canvas.

**Project synopsis:** I would like you to share a summary of your project with your peers, either via a short (about 5 minutes) audio or video presentation, or by writing a 500-word synopsis of what you did and what you learned. This project synopsis will comprise a part of your overall project grade.

## POLICIES & RESOURCES

### **Email:**

All students are expected to check their ciis email accounts regularly and to stay on top of course announcements. Please treat email as a professional form of communication and use standard grammar and punctuation. I will respond to you within 2 business days; I do not generally respond to emails over the weekend.

### **Academic Integrity**

Creative and original scholarly research is at the heart of the Institute's academic purpose. It is essential that faculty and students pursue their academic work with the utmost integrity. This means that all academic work produced by an individual is the result of the individual's efforts and that those efforts acknowledge explicitly any contribution by another person. Reproducing another's work and submitting it as one's own work or without acknowledging the source is called "plagiarism," or stealing the intellectual property of another, which is the antithesis of scholarly research. Any use of other ideas or others' expression in any medium without attribution is a serious violation of academic standards. If confirmed, plagiarism subjects a student to disciplinary action.

### **Accessibility and Well-Being:**

It is my goal to create an accessible course design. If you anticipate any issues related to the requirements of this course, please meet with me so that we can explore potential options. Students with disabilities may also wish to work with CIIS Student Disability Services for additional resources, including official accommodations. Please contact [sds@ciis.edu](mailto:sds@ciis.edu) if you wish to contact their office.

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students' office for support ([yyip@ciis.edu](mailto:yyip@ciis.edu)). Furthermore, please notify me and/or your academic advisor if you are comfortable in doing so. Also let me know if you are facing a challenge with purchasing any of the required books. (Adapted from a statement by Prof. Sara Goldrick-Rab of Temple University). CIIS also provides students with wellness services and support for emotional challenges. Visit <https://www.ciis.edu/student-resources/health-and-wellness>

### **Incomplete Policy:**

CIIS has adopted the following Incomplete Policy to be applied across the university:

Permission to be given an “I” grade is given only in the following circumstances:

- a. medical reasons documented by a health-care professional.
- b. a family emergency verified with supporting documentation.
- c. decision by the faculty member based on exceptional pedagogical reasons.

For reasons “a” or “b,” students are given a maximum of two semesters to finish their coursework. Please note that in many cases, a shorter extension will be granted (e.g. one month or one semester). Also note that reason “c” was developed for serious extenuating circumstances only; in this case, a maximum of one semester is granted for the Incomplete. If you believe that you will need to request an incomplete for this course, please let me know as soon as possible – Incompletes will not be granted on the day or two before the final paper is due.

## **COURSE CALENDAR PART I: INTENSIVE (JAN 25 & 26)**

### **Activities**

Experiential exercises, brief lecture, student mini-presentations, and film viewing of *A Force More Powerful*.

### **Readings:**

1. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence” pp. 35-40 and “Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom [1966]” pp. 54-61 from *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr*
2. Mark Engler and Paul Engler, *This is an Uprising* (excerpt)
3. “I’m a citizen of the universe: Gloria Anzaldua’s Spiritual Activism as Catalyst for Social Change” by AnaLouise Keating
4. *Transforming Feminist Practice*, Chapter 1 (Introduction)

## **COURSE CALENDAR PART II: CANVAS (FEB 5 – MAY 5)**

The in-person, intensive portion of this class was the equivalent of 5 three-hour classes. Because we completed 5 classes so early in the semester, we have time for a break before we resume class in February.

Please note that I may make slight changes to the course schedule and reading list based on new research and current events. Any changes to the syllabus will be announced on Canvas; information on Canvas supersedes what’s on this syllabus.

### **MODULE 2: Indigenous Perspectives**

#### **Feb 5-11: Reading week**

*Texts:*

- *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change* by Sherri Mitchell (OK to skim some of the middle chapters if needed. Please do read Chapters 1-5 and 15-18).
- “Walking in Balance: The Spirituality-Liberation Praxis of Native Women” by Andrea Smith
- “Behind Dakota pipeline protest\_ Native American religious revival” (brief news article) CSMonitor.pdf
- Indigenous activist videos posted on Canvas

### **Feb 12-18: Posting week**

## **PROJECT OUTLINE DUE FEB 19**

### **MODULE 3: Feminist Spirituality**

#### **Feb 19-25: Reading week**

- Fernandes: Ch 3: “Practice” and Ch 5: “Spirituality”
- *The Womanist Idea* (excerpts) by Layli Maparyan
- “Now Let us Shift” by Gloria Anzaldua
- “Re-Enchanting Feminism: Challenging Religious and Secular Patriarchies” by Alka Arora
- Film: *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*
- Podcast: *On Feminism’s Fourth Wave* by Alka Arora (optional)

#### **Feb 26-March 3: Posting week**

### **MODULE 4: Spirituality, Embodiment, and Racial Justice**

#### **March 4-10: Reading week**

- *Transforming Feminist Practice*, Fernandes Ch 2: Identity & Ch 4: Knowledge
  - *My Grandmothers’ Hands*, Part 1 (pp. 1-136)
  - “The Vehicle (pp. 30-35)” by Eduardo Duran
  - Podcast: “Black Panthers, Activism, and Spiritual Practice,” by Ericka Huggins
- Select One:*
- *Living in the Tension: The Quest for a Spiritualized Racial Justice* (excerpt) by Shelly Tochluk or
  - *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening through Race, Sexuality, and Gender* (excerpt) by Zenju Earthlynn Manuel

#### **March 11-17: Posting week**

### **MODULE 5: Family, Community, and Healing Justice**

#### **March 18 - 31: Reading Period and Spring Break (Spring Break is March 23-27)**

- *Family Activism* (excerpt) by Roberto Vargas

- *Fleshing the Spirit* (excerpt) ed. by Facio and Lara
- *Revolutionary Mothering* (excerpt)
- “Uses of the Erotic” by Audre Lorde and other excerpts from *Pleasure Activism* by adrienne maree brown
- “Oppression, Trauma, and Healing Justice” from *Healing Justice* by Loretta Pyles
- “Love as Political Resistance,” by adrienne maree brown (blog article)
- “Introduction to Archetypal Activism” by Craig Chalquist
- Podcast: Select one podcast to listen to from <https://www.healingjustice.org/podcast>

### **April 1-7: Posting week**

## **MODULE 6: Ecology and Animal Rights**

### **April 8-14: Reading week**

- *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths* (excerpt) by Melanie Harris
- “Animal Personhood in Mi’kmaq Perspective” by Margaret Robinson
- *The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature* (excerpt) by Starhawk
- “Small Small Redemption” by Sangamithra Iyer in *Sister Species*
- “On Mythic Cows and the Dairy Industry: An Archetypal Activist Exploration” (blog post) by Olga Sohmer
- *We are the Weather* (excerpt) Jonathan Safran Foer
- Film: *A Prayer for Compassion*

### **April 15-21: Posting week**

## **MODULE 7: Reconciliation and Restorative Justice**

### **April 22-28: Reading week**

- “A Restorative Lens” by Howard Zehr
- “Defining Traditional Healing” by Gloria Lee
- Case studies from *The Womanist Idea* by Layli Maparyan
- “Gender, Power and Justice: A Feminist Perspective on Restorative Justice and Intimate Violence” (excerpt) by Angela Cameron
- “Introduction” and “Cure of Grace: The Alchemy of Reconciliation” from *Divine Duality* by Will Keepin
- Podcast: “On Healing Resistance” Kazu Haga and Sonya Shah

### **April 29- May 5: Posting week & Zoom Call**

**May 6-11: Make up days; Post your project synopses online**



\*\*\*Final Papers Due May 8\*\*\*

*Have a wonderful summer!*