

Unitarian Universalist History HS 8423
SKSM Fall 2008
Syllabus and Booklist

Unitarian Universalist history, as that of other faith traditions, has evolved from multiple and often diverse sources – some quite ancient, some (re)emerging during the Renaissance and Radical Reformation, others manifesting themselves in the social ferment of mid-nineteenth century America, and again in Civil Rights movements of mid-twentieth century. It is a tradition that continues to undergo dynamic change today. The course is designed to give students the opportunity to examine the events and individuals of Unitarian Universalist history. The goals are not only to facilitate incorporation of complex historical material into the student's individual spiritual development, but also to inform an approach to professional ministry. Consistent with Starr King's commitment to theological education that seeks to advance the creation of just communities able to counter oppressions, the course gives particular attention to how Unitarian and Universalist fellowships and individuals have responded to various forms of religious and social oppression throughout its history. The course will also relate significant historical episodes to contemporary social, philosophical, and ethical dilemmas that continue to demand attention and resolution.

The course is divided into fourteen units. Compact lecture segments help students assimilate the broad sequence of historical events. Each unit also raises particular philosophical and theological questions about the material. For each unit there are basic recommended readings, as well as opportunities for the student to explore individuals or theological issues in greater depth on their own, in consultation with the professor. Supplementary readings are also included for students to pursue at their leisure.

As a graduate level course, it is expected that students will devote 7 – 10 hours per week to their work. Students are expected to complete assigned readings, to review the lecture materials, and post their thoughts on the online class discussion each week. Students' weekly postings should include at least two well-thought out questions raised by the lecture material and readings. Each student will also post a one-page reflection paper on topics assigned by the professor at the one-third and two-third points of the course. Each student will also research and write a 10 – 15 page analytic paper on a topic of their choice to be submitted during the final week of class.

The professor logs on each day to review postings, and to respond as needed. This will include review and comment on reflection papers posted. Students should always feel free to e-mail the professor directly if they have concerns regarding the class. Students are provided the freedom and responsibility to shape discussion according to their common interests. This means that the ultimate shape of the course will reflect the fluidity, rather than the static sense, of Unitarian Universalist history. Through shared examination of origins, significant individuals, and historical events, critical issues that continue to call for attention today may be invested with new meaning and new possibilities for resolution.

Unit 1: Ancient Sources

What are the earliest sources of Unitarian and Universalist religious and philosophical ideas? Where can they be found in classical and Hellenistic thought, other faith traditions, and in early Christian theological controversies involving figures such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Arius?

Unit 2: Renaissance Humanism

What humanist values of modern liberal religion had their origins in the Renaissance? What were the key events, concepts, and historical individuals from this period of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that informed subsequent Unitarian and Universalist theologies?

Unit 3: Dissent and Reform in Sixteenth Century Europe

What were the defining characteristics of the Radical Reformation? What was the context from which Unitarian, Anabaptist, and Universalist thinking emerged within debates about religious reform that shaped political and social life in sixteenth century Europe? What were the contributions of the Polish Brethren and anti-trinitarians such as Michael Servetus?

Unit 4: Socinianism, Arminianism, and Religious Freedom in Europe and England

What Unitarian communities emerged in Eastern Europe, and how did these ideas and beliefs spread west to England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries? What were the unique elements of the Polish Minor Church (the Socinians) and the Transylvanian Unitarians? What was the significance of Jacobus Arminius?

Unit 5: Separatists and Puritanism in England and North America

What were the links between Continental European Unitarianism and its origins in England? How was the influence of the Enlightenment and the thought of Joseph Priestley important for liberal theology? What was the path by which these European movements informed the English Separatists, New England Pilgrims, Puritanism, and the evolution into Congregationalist, Unitarian, and Universalist churches of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?

Unit 6: Universalism in North America

How did Universalism emerge in eighteenth and early nineteenth century America? What developments occurred within the Great Awakening, and the theology of Jonathan Edwards, as well as the theology of universal salvation proclaimed by John Murray and Hosea Ballou?

Unit 7: Classical Unitarianism in America

What were the events that led up to the final split between the liberals and orthodox of New England in what came to be known as the Unitarian Controversy? What was the role of some of the important early leaders of institutional Unitarianism such as Henry Ware and William Ellery Channing?

Unit 8: Transcendentalism

In what way was Transcendentalism one of our movement's most important contributions to theology, philosophy, and literature? Who were the Transcendentalists? What was their dispute with more traditional Unitarianism? What beliefs did they share?

Unit 9: Faith & Conscience: Abolition, Women's Rights, and Native Americans

In what ways did Abolition become one of our movement's most important contributions to social change, and its philosophy and literature? How were women's rights and the sovereignty of gender roles challenged and debated among Unitarians and Universalists? How did liberals and people of conscience respond to the "Indian Question" within the westward expansion of Euro-American settlement in the United States? How did these issues nurture development of the social gospel movement of the late nineteenth century, and bridge the gulf between faith and social action for religious liberals? What important leaders of the nineteenth century women's movement were affiliated with Unitarianism and Universalism?

Unit 10: Progressives from 1865-1920

As denominations moved westward in the second half of the nineteenth century, what theological and institutional changes became part of the history of our movement? In what ways were some of these changes embodied in the story of the Iowa Sisterhood, a group of liberal women ministers in the Midwest? How did various forms of Spiritualism, Humanism, increasing awareness of world religions, and progressive philosophies influence both Unitarians and Universalists during this era?

Unit 11: Crisis of Liberalism

How did the growth of industrialism and World War I shake liberal religion in the early decades of the twentieth century, and provoke such diverse theological movements as the Social Gospel, Humanism, and Neo-orthodoxy? How did Unitarians and Universalists foster and respond to these movements?

Unit 12: Merger, Consolidation and Polity

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, what institutional changes occurred within each denomination? How did they lead to a movement toward consolidation of the two movements? What occurred during the historic merger event of our tradition?

Unit 13: Race Matters

How did the Civil Rights movement become a pivotal and important event in the lives of many Unitarian Universalists and in the institutional life of the young denomination itself? In what ways were UUs involved in civil rights efforts, as well as other struggles for justice, and economic fairness, including the Black Empowerment controversy?

Unit 14: Body, Faith, and Reason: Who Are We at Fifty?

How have contemporary issues of ecology, gender, race, religious liberalism in the context of a religiously plural world challenged our movement? How have Unitarian Universalists responded? How should UU congregations respond today?

Books

The Larger Faith by Charles A. Howe, published by Skinner House Books, 1993, ISBN 1-55896-308-1

Unitarian Universalism and the Quest for Racial Justice, Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993, ISBN: 1-55896-318-9

Blessing the World: What Can Save Us Now, Rebecca Ann Parker, edited by Robert Hardies, Skinner House Press, 2006, ISBN 1-55896-515-7

The Transcendentalists, by Perry Miller, Harvard University Press, MA, 1950, ISBN: 0-674-90333-1

Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing, Emerson, Parker, introduced by Conrad Wright, Unitarian Universalist Association, Boston, 1980 (4th printing)

Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966) Please note: this text is currently out of print but likely available at libraries.

David Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985)

Ernest Cassara, ed. *Universalism in America: A Documentary History of a Liberal Faith* (Boston: Skinner House, 1971)

For Further Reading

Robert R. N. Ross, *Walking to New Orleans: Ethics and the Concept of Participatory Design in Post-Disaster Reconstruction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008) ISBN 13: 978-1-55635-224-9

Please note: Books may be found at the GTU Bookstore (510 642-9000, x683) or email text@berkeley.edu. Or order texts from the UUA Bookstore (+800) 215-9076. Other options include www.bookfinder.com or www.amazon.com.