Unlearning Towards Freedom:  
Self-Love & Mutual Aid

POL 40951, CRN: 17051  
Spring 2022  
Class Time: MW: 2:15-3:30pm  
Bowman Hall 224

Professor: Joshua Stacher  
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“Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate. This can only be done by projecting the ethic of love to the center of our lives.”  
- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1959)

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgent. It is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.”  
- Audre Lorde (1988)

“When we chose to love, we chose to move against fear, against alienation, and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect, to find ourselves in the other.”  
- bell hooks (1999)

“Anyone who is interested in making change in the world also has to learn how to take care of herself, himself, theirselves…It means that we are able to bring our entire selves into the movement. It means a holistic approach.”  
- Angela Y Davis (2018)

“For nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.”  
- James Baldwin (1924-1987)

Course Description
This course is about your freedom and serving others as a way to encourage nonviolent mass social change. The classroom and our engagements will provide the setting for exploring what it means to be free during a pandemic in late-stage neoliberal capitalism where political parties are not really parties, governments project difficulty governing, economic inequality is increasing, society is polarizing, and climate change is hurling destruction and displacement at so many. All of this speaks to little about how these dynamics appear internationally, which is arguably more dire. Put shortly, it is entirely reasonable that people feel stuck. This “stuck” feeling encourages the privledged to disengage socially as the marginalized suffer normalized oppression as a daily experience. The withdrawl seems rational given what the privledged “know” but that choice keeps the oppression locked in for others. Someone might even ask, “The oppression is unfair but what alternatives do we really have?” It is my intention to use all of the materials, conversations, assignments, and practices in this course to help you answer this question for yourself after we experiment a bit together.
This course’s premise accepts that this system has unrefordable structural features that marginalize, recognizes the dilemma’s “stuckness,” and sees that the status quo is not sustainable for the system’s “self-considered” winners and millions of those victimized by social institutions that use violence to maintain “order” by disrupting actions of dissent or resistance. Invariably, this repressive and grinding condition produces a revolutionary social undercurrent that demands change. But how do you individually engage in behaviors that flow with such change? This is a pressing question given the coming change is bundled with uncertainty.

In *Unlearning Towards Freedom*, we will explore ways of learning that revolve around two questions to guide our experiences this semester: 1) How do you get free? After developing daily practices to embody and experience what freedom means, I want you to apply what you learn and understand from your self-love experiment to the social conditions you experience and have learned about. Next, we will develop an understanding of mutual aid and solidarity with others. Specifically, we ask: 2) Can mutual aid and solidarity practices build the so-called “Beloved Community” where everyone is cared for and there is no poverty, hunger, and hate.

The course’s premise is structural analysis, on its own, is of little utility. For example, how do we take what we know from history and change the patterns of violence, exploitation, and impoverishment that we see all around us during the pandemic. We need something more than just facts and science. University research is not coming to our rescue. Thankfully, some models are out there. We will look to these models and use our bodies as the vehicles of political change we seek by journaling, reading, watching, listening, and contemplating the material over the semester.

When we bring union and connection to our body and mind, not only do we develop inner clarity and wisdom but we also understand the power of taking care of ourselves so we can serve and build community with others. Our bodies become the vehicles for resisting oppression and building community with others. Radical Self-Care¹ is the enduring lessons and the legacies of the Black Panthers, and many of the radical black feminists such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks.

In this class, we will dive into theoretical works and philosophically debate metaphysical considerations such as universal love, justice, and peace as well as violence and its effects. We will marinate ourselves in the practices of pedagogy, community care and mutual aid. We will read, watch, and listen to material that challenges us to be creative about bringing the personal to the structural. We will achieve this through contemplative practices (like journaling and meditation) as well as by inviting everyone to develop their attentional fitness according to their impulses. Body movement such as self-home-practice yoga or regular non-distracted walks are also encouraged. The idea is that the more we practice self-love as the starting point, we will be able to see how the practice affects us and connects us to structural findings that so much social science and humanities research reveals.

This class is an experiement and a process for developing a practice of Radical Self-Care as you teach yourself how your self-care process connects to the structural analysis we engage with this semester. Therefore, you will be developing your ability to see and understand structural analysis while also developing practices of RSC to see how this changes the experience of knowing or learning things.

This class is a daily commitment to practice political change though self-love with me. Whether it is developing a self-care routine, learning to get comfortable in silence, or learning to listen to your internal

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¹ Radical Self-Care (RSC) means you have the responsibility to take care of yourself first before attempting to take care of others. It's necessary to fill your cup first, then to give to others from the overflow.
needs and wants, the road to political liberation travels through us individually before it realizes itself collectively. By exploring different aspects of the metapyshical universe, love, justice and practicing things like meditation and yoga, this course intends to link that process to the structural analysis we learn about in class. Through assignments that focus on your personal and scholarly development, students will become informed and critical consumers of information and learn how to engage deliberatively with oppressive concepts that make up our world.

At a minimum, this classroom needs to be a space to transgress what we all conventionally “know.” If we are lucky, the experiences this class produces might facilitate a way for us to unlearn our way to freedom. My intention is that this class becomes a practice of freedom. Please accept the invitation.

**Required Texts:**
A lot of the texts we will use this semester are available through the library. There will be as much photocopying as possible and I will be placing everything on Canvas for your use to keep costs down. I have also included a number of places where there are viewing and listening alternatives to the reading. All of the listening and viewing is free. Most of the viewing is through Kanopy or Youtube. If there is something you really want to watch and there is a paywall, let me know and we will collectively figure it out. The viewing and the listening material can also be used with the readings as a supplement.

**Other Materials**
You **never** need to buy a subscription or membership or pay a fee. I use free apps and instruction.

Please remember, however, that these are your self-love practices and you decide when enough is enough. Any activity you engage in is by your own decision. Be sure to take these practices at a pace that works for you and do what you need to do to support your well-being; get the sleep you need, eat well, take breaks as you need them, and back off your practice if you need to. You can also ground yourself in everyday tasks. You are the best person to know what your self care needs are at any given time, so find a balance that works for you.

Take these practices slowly but consistently and you will develop your awareness and this awareness will change how you learn. That all said: the more time you spend practicing yoga or meditating or breath work – the better you will get at it. The less you engage these tools, you will unlikely see few changes from your existing perspectives. A rule of thumb is commit to trying a little bit everyday as opposed to one massive dump of self-care per week.

You need no mat. Just a towel on the floor and a bottle of water to stay hydrated. A mat – like the rest of it (the props, the clothes, the accessories) can all come later. For now, find a quiet space and practice.

1) Meditation App – [insight timer](https://www.insighttimer.com)
2) Youtube Yogis:
   - Arianna Elizabeth
   - Yoga with Adriene
   - Dianne Bondy Yoga
   - Faith Hunter
Other suggestions in this article.

3) Mindfulness Podcasts – There are a variety of mindfulness/contemplative podcasts. I am happy to supply suggestions.

Course Requirements

1) Class Attendance and Participation | 10-percent
2) Journal | 70-percent (7-journal entries)
3) Resubmitted Final Paper | 20-percent (May 2, 2022)

I. Attendance & Participation

The Attendance/Participation portion of the course is 10-percent of your grade.

Class meetings is where the magic happens. It is where we come together and learn new things as a group. Given the unpredictability of classroom epiphanies, it is most beneficial that you are attending class and present. This is a part-lecture/part-seminar style course. Its success depends on your attendance and active participation. Because this is a discussion-based class (through small group discussions and together), your growth is tied to you coming prepared to discuss and engage with a particular topic. This is the key to your development of critical thinking skills as well as personal and research growth. I am not bothered if you want to read, listen, or watch an assigned topic. But please do one of the three and take down notes, observations, responses, and questions to the material. They could be physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual or a combination of these responses.

Attendance: The students do the best in my courses are the ones that stay current with their journal entries, attend regularly, and engage with me and their colleagues inside and outside the classroom. They are also the students that are interested in developing their worldviews, politics, and themselves.

I will not actively be taking attendance. We live in the COVID-19 era so our face-to-face meetings are an opportunity to have a communal space to learn is our motivation to keep showing up. I want students to be connected to this course because it helps them process all the changes surrounding all of us now. If you keep current and attend as regularly as you can, you will get a lot out of this course. If you cannot for any number of reasons, I pledge to have deep empathy for your whatever circumstances arise in your life and I am committed to respecting how much mental bandwidth you have. You do not and are not obligated to tell me anything personal. I will accept generalized dynamics in your life as truthful. And I never need to see a medical excuse. This is for your privacy.

**Please do NOT attend class if you are sick. Even if you just have the sniffles, STAY HOME and protect others please. I will do everything in my power to make this course accessible.

Participation: Active participation begins with your reading, viewing, listening, note taking, thinking, contemplating, and the observing you do before class. You should always come to class prepared to contribute to class discussion and debate. We will often work in socially distant, small groups because of the character of the course so your active participation in small group discussions and exercises is important.

In-class writing: In many classes, we will do some kind of spontaneous writing. These often take the form of the “freewrite” at the beginning of class. These writing tasks can be expanded on in your journal (discussed below). These exercises are intended to help you process and critically reflect on all the
information incrementally. We will often use these writing pieces to help generate class discussion. The freewrites are not graded; rather they are intended to function as one record of your thought process throughout the semester. Further instructions and a handout will be provided detailing the expectations about the journal assignments.

II. Journals

You are required to keep a journal of your weekly reflections of the course material and your progress with your self-care project. I want you to use the journal to develop beyond the material. Use the journal to develop yourself, your thoughts, and your research interests. You will be given a sheet of format expectations, rules of engagement with me, the prompts, and questions that ask you to reflect on a question or topic related to the course material or to reflect on ideas and concepts that are confusing or unclear in the readings. I am also very interested in you becoming more aware of what moves you as a person, because this is where political change really starts.

The standards for the journal assignment are attached as an addendum to this semester’s syllabus. You will submit your weekly entries to me as a sharable google doc (that I have editing access to) over email. The journaling is effectively the bulk of your grade at 70-percent. Which journal entries you choose to submit is up to you. You decide which ones are your best or clearest work and submit those. Or maybe they are the submissions you are working through. Submit the entries that you are most proud of. The deadlines for the journal submissions throughout the semester is on Fridays at 8am. You do not have to wait for the deadline to submit. I cannot accept late journal submissions two weeks past the deadline because the deadlines correspond with class assignments. You can submit your individual journal entries when you feel they demonstrates analysis or developments that you wish to share with me. I will never share what you write with anyone else (unless you grant permission). I want your journals to be personal and reflective. But I also want them intermingling with the research ideas of structural analysis. We are all entering a changing world. We learn new things by processing them in our journals.

In your journal, I will be looking for a demonstration of your understanding of the course material and academic concepts as well as your reflective coherence and how deeply one probes the material. I want to see how a dedicated self-care program produces a change in yourself. There is more regarding the grading standards regarding the journals on the Journal Handout.

III. Final Paper

This is worth 20-percent of your grade and is due by 5pm on Friday, May 6, 2022. This is a University designated Writing Intensive Course (WIC), which satisfies a necessary requirement for graduation. This means there are limitations as to how I can accept student work. For this course, we are looking a 14-20 page paper (12pt font, double spaced, with 1” margins). Please submit your Final Paper as a sharable Google Doc (sharable in that I can edit it) to my email address.

What I propose is that you do at least the seven journal prompts so that you can indicate what interests you, how you want to think about it, how your self-care routine is producing changes in how you learn, and also any thoughts about the feedback you receive from me. After you have all that, then the Final Paper is a submitted. This final document is re-considered drafts of the journal entries that also tries to develop your writing style as well as allows you to manage outside suggestions and invitations. The goal will be to systematize your thinking about the course experiences and materials. Then, I can read your larger reflections and what knowledge you discovered and how research speaks or fails to speak to changes you noticed by maintaining a self-care routine. The final paper topic is debatable but we will have lots of chances to discuss it.
Grading Scale

A: 93-100, A-: 90-92  
B+: 87-89, B: 83-86, B-: 80-82  
C+: 77-79, C: 73-76, C-: 70-72  
D+: 67-69, D: 60-66

Course & Reading Schedule

W 1/19  Class 1: Syllabus distribution, class introduction, setting expectations

M 1/24  Class 2: **Who are you? Storytelling**
Read: bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking* (2010), pgs. 49-53


W 1/26  Class 3: **What are Contemplative Practices?**
Watch: “bell hooks: cultural criticism and transformation”

Explore The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education website (especially the Contemplation Tree)

M 1/31  Class 4: **The Universe’s View on Love and Violence**
Read: Martin Luther King Jr., “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” (1959)


W 2/2  Class 5: **Normalized Annihilation**
Read: Carol Cohn, “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals” *Signs* (Summer 1987) 687-718.

Watch: Dr. Stranglove (1964)

M 2/7  Class 6: **Guest Engagement**
Dawn M. Rivers, owner of Daybreak Yoga
“What is self-care? Why is it important?”


W 2/9  Class 7: **Beyond Vietnam**
Listen:

1) “MLK: Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence” (1967)

Watch: MLK/FBI (2020)

M 2/14 Class 8: The Heart of Violence
Watch: Apocalyspe Now (1977)
Part 1 & Part 2


W 2/16 Class 9: You Mad Bro?


Listen: “Age of Anger” Festival of Dangerous Ideas (2018)

M 2/21 Class 10: All about Love
Read: bell hooks, All About Love (1999)

Watch: bell hooks Interview, All about Love, (1999)


W 2/23 Class 11: All about Love
Read: bell hooks, All About Love (1999)


M 2/28 Class 12: Pedagogy of the Oppressed
Read: Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970)

Listen: “Pedagogy of the Oppressed,”

Watch:
### Class 13: Pedagogy of the Oppressed


Watch: [On Meditation](#) (2016)

### Class 14: Worlds Beyond Repression and Oppression
Read: David Wallace-Wells, “Ten Million a Year,” *LRB* (December 2021)

Watch: [A Quest for Meaning](#) (2015)
and/or
[Fire in Paradise](#) (2018)

Listen: Interview with Ericka Huggins about the Panthers, Huey P. Newton Foundation (~minute 42)

### Class 15: The Black Panther Party’s Survival Programs
Read:

Watch: [The Black Panthers: Vanguards of the Revolution](#) (2016)

Listen:

### Class 16: The Politics of Care
Read: The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto* (2020)


Listen: “The Politics of Interdependence” (Interview with
W 3/16  Class 17: **The Politics of Care**  
Read: The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto* (2020)  

M 3/21  Class 18: **Mutual Aid**  
Read:  
2) Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid* (2020)  

W 3/23  Class 19: **Mutual Aid**  
Read: Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid* (2020)  
Listen: “Dean Spade on Mutual Aid,” The Arts of Travel Podcast (2021)

MW 3/28-4/1  **Spring Break**

M 4/4  Class 20: **Exterminate All the Brutes**  
Watch: Episode One & Two  
Read: *Review by Richard Brody* in the New Yorker (April 2021)

W 4/6  Class 21: **Kill ‘Em All**  
Watch: Episode Three & Four  
Read: Jon Schwartz, “500 years of Genocide in the Making,” *The Intercept* (May 2021)  
Listen: “EATB” episode, Rumble with Michael Moore (May
### Class 22: The Wretched of the Earth
Reading: Frantz Fanon, “On Violence,” *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), pgs. 1-62

Watch: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

Listening: 1) “Frantz Fanon and the Violence of Colonialism,” *Philosophy Talk* (January 2018)

### Class 23: Black Feminism
Reading: 1) The Combahee River Collective Statement  
2) Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “Until Black Women are Free, None of Us Will Be Free,” *The New Yorker* (July 20, 2020)


Viewing: “What we can Learn from the Black Feminists of the Combahee River Collective,” *Democracy Now!* (January 22, 2018)

Optional Film Suggestion: *Harriet* on HBO, Hulu, & Amazon Prime

### Class 24: Colonialism and Climate Change
Read: Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg’s Curse* (2021), pgs. 5-120


### Class 25: Militarism and The Earth as a Resource

Watch: *Requiem for an American Dream*

Listen: Interview with Ghosh, *The Sandip Roy Show* (December 2021)

### Class 26: A Vitalist Politics
Read: Ghosh, *Nutmeg’s Curse*, pgs. 235-257

W 4/27  Class 27: Returning to Self-Care in a Violence-Filled World
   Read:

          2) “Getting Over Yourself,” 10-percent Happier Podcast (2021)

M 5/2  Class 28: Politicizing Yoga
   Read:
   1) Cara Hagan, Practicing Yoga as Resistance (2021), tbd
   2) Janice Rhoshalle Littlejohn, “Practicing Rest as Resistance,” (December 2020)

   Watch: Room to Breathe (2015)

   Listen: “Yoga is Personal AND Political with Michelle C Johnson,” The Opt-in (February 2020)

Final Papers are Due (May 6, 2022)

Thank you for struggling with yourself and the material this semester!

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Policies, Notes, & Disclaimers:

1) **Help:** If you are having problems with this course, the readings/viewings/listening options, or the assessments I urge you to come to my office hours. If those times are not convenience for you, please email me (jstacher@kent.edu). I will gladly schedule a virtual appointment over zoom to suit your schedule. We will use whatever is most convenient platform for office hours. Whatever you do, **DO NOT** wait until it is too late to get help. Be in conversation with me about your circumstances.

2) **Decorum:** Everyone is entitled to say whatever they wish in the classroom. However, the central aspect to being able to be informed and critical thinking students requires a welcoming forum. The instructor will not tolerate insulting, marginalizing, sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic, or intimidating statements or behavior towards your colleagues in class. You can anticipate implicitly or explicitly marginalized statements to be pointed out and debated in a respectful way. Opinions without evidence to support the claim will be understood to be of lesser value than supported claims.

3) **Accessibility Services:** University policy 3-01.3 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must
first verify your eligibility for these through Student Accessibility Services (contact 330-672-3391 or visit www.kent.edu/sas for more information on registration procedures).

4) Graduation Application – January 21, 2022 is the final day that eligible students can apply for Spring 2022 graduation.

5) Registration Requirement: The official registration deadline for this course is Jan 24, 2022. University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines ‘should not’ be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Each student must confirm enrollment by checking his/her class schedule (using Student Tools in FlashLine) prior to the deadline indicated. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the deadline.

6) Drop/Add: The deadline to drop/add is January 24, 2022.

7) Withdraw Deadline: The withdraw deadline for this course is April 4, 2022.

8) On Cheating and Plagiarism:
University policy 3-01.8 deals with the problem of academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism. None of these will be tolerated in this class. I will pursue instances of suspected plagiarism or cheating and if substantiated, you will fail this course. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. If you have any questions, please read the policy at http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/administrative-policy-regarding-student-cheating-and-plagiarism

9) Ombuds - If a Professor requires you to attend class when you are sick, it puts all of us in danger. Please report all violations to the Ombuds office. It's your responsibility to report.

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