

Justice and Civil Society
LDST 210
Fall 2026
Course Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Craig T. Kocher
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Office hours: by appointment
Class meeting time Monday and Wednesday, 3:00-4:15pm. Location: Jepson 101

Purpose

This course is shaped by the following three foundational questions:

- 1) What is justice?
- 2) What is justice in society?
- 3) What does justice mean to me?

Together we will explore ancient and modern theories of justice as they relate to society. Readings will focus on the nature of civil society, theories of personal and communal expressions of justice, and social and moral analysis of significant challenges facing contemporary society, with a particular emphasis on Richmond, Virginia and Northern Ireland.

The course includes a travel experience to Northern Ireland to explore the political and religious context of *The Troubles*, with attention to the struggle for civil rights in that region of the world and the more recent processes of peace-making and reconciliation. Students will be asked to compare and contrast the two social locations of Richmond, VA and Northern Ireland.

The course includes a Community-Based-Learning (CBL) component in the second semester in which students engage with the lived experience of social challenge by serving in an elementary school in the Richmond Public School system.

Learning Objectives

In seeking to answer the three foundational questions, the course shall enable students to meet these objectives:

- explore the relationship between justice and contemporary society;
- analyze social challenges in light of different theories of justice;
- learn from and with others of different backgrounds and beliefs;
- develop relationships across lines of difference within a community-based organization;
- discern and develop personal values and goals;
- reflect on career and personal opportunities to advance justice in society.

PEIC Course

This course also serves to fulfill the power, equity, identity, and culture component of the general education curriculum.

The power, equity, identity, and culture (PEIC) component of the general education curriculum strives to prepare students to understand, analyze, and contribute to a diverse, complex, and interconnected world. It engages students in a discussion about diversity and power imbalances either in the past or present among various cultural perspectives, within the U.S. or abroad. Students learn about inequities in particular societies and eras as well as efforts that aim to reduce them, and the challenges and opportunities diversity brings. Additionally, this component of the general education curriculum encourages students to engage with questions about how attitudes, experiences, and/or beliefs are shaped by context and cultural identity.

1. Students will analyze the origins and dynamics of structural inequities and power imbalances in specific societal contexts.
2. Students will analyze how attitudes, experiences, and/or beliefs are shaped both by context and/or cultural identity.
3. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the effects of inequities and power imbalances on a society, and the historical or current efforts, successful and unsuccessful, used to reduce such effects.

Required Texts

Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?
Michael Sandel

Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis
Robert Putnam

Just Mercy
Bryan Stephenson

Other Readings

All other readings will be emailed ahead of time.

Graded work (1000 points total)

- Class participation: 75 points
- Three reading quizzes: 75 points (25 points each)
- Paper 1: 150 points
- Paper 2: 200 points
- Presentation: 200 points
- Paper 3: 250 points

Graded work defined

- **Class participation:** This means attending class prepared and alert. High marks will be given to students who engage thoughtfully and regularly with the readings, the content of the lectures, and the reflections of their peers. Two journal entries will be included in the class participation grade. No electronics allowed (computers, tablets, phones) unless required for learning accommodations. Drinks are allowed in class; food is not. Students should use the bathroom ahead of class time so as not to disrupt the chemistry of the class. Students are expected to be in class unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor beforehand.
- **Reading quizzes:** The course readings are central to the learning goals of the class. There will be three pop quizzes throughout the semester to ensure students are reading and comprehending the material.
- **Presentation:** Each student will give a ten-minute in-class presentation near the end of the semester.
- **Papers:** Each student will write three papers of 1600-1800 words each. The three papers should follow the format below. They are to be emailed to the instructor as a PDF before 5:00 p.m. on the due date assigned in the syllabus or by the beginning of class if the due date falls on a day class meets.

The three papers should be organized as follows. The organization also serves as a pattern for the response paper and journal entries, though word limitation for those assignments will necessitate significant focus from the author. The papers should use Chicago style footnotes.

1. *Format.* Please type the paper double-spaced, in Times New Roman font size 12, on one side of the paper only, with one-inch margins all the way around. Page numbers should be at the bottom center.
2. *Title.* Think carefully about how your title communicates the argument of the paper in an attractive way, and whether you want to use a subtitle. The title, name of course, word count, and your name should be on a cover sheet.
3. *Introduction.* Write this after you have written your paper, so that it genuinely introduces:
 - the argument that follows
 - the specific ways in which you are narrowing your subject down to a manageable size
 - the specific terms you are using that need some definition

- the introduction should not take up more than 5% of a paper of this kind. One or two paragraphs should do it. The introduction for the response papers and journal entries may be only a couple of sentences.
- 4. *Main body of the paper.* A sequence of subheadings that divide the paper into logical, roughly even-length sections reassures the professor that the argument has been planned and reasoned carefully before being written.
- 5. *Conclusion.* Should be very short and summarize main findings.

Grading Standards:

These standards have been articulated by Jepson faculty members and serve as a helpful guide for students preparing papers.

“A” work is well-written, well-argued, and thoroughly conversant with the source material, containing no major inaccuracies or contradictions, and illustrating subtlety and nuance of argument. “A” papers consist of interesting, substantial thoughts well-packaged in technically proficient writing.

“B” work attempts to forward an argument and shows good familiarity with and understanding of the source material, and is generally well-written. There are generally two genres of “B” work: papers that have some of the qualities of an “A” paper, but also contain serious flaws; and papers that contain no serious flaws, but also lack originality or depth of perceptiveness, or simply fail to be persuasive.

“C” work makes an attempt to complete an assignment but contains substantial flaws, either of writing quality, inadequate comprehension of the material, unsupported arguments, and/or logically contradictory or implausible arguments.

“D” and “F” work refers to papers that are seriously inadequate and fail to meet the basic requirements of the assignment.

Late Paper Policy: Papers should be emailed to the instructor as a PDF. Students will receive a one letter grade penalty for every day an assignment is late.

Attendance Policy: Students are expected to be in class unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor. Unexcused absences will negatively impact the student’s final grade.

The Honor System: The Jepson School supports and adheres to the provisions of the Honor System as sanctioned by the School of Arts and Sciences. All work should be your own. A violation of the Honor System may result in a failing grade for the course.

AI Policy: The Honor Code prohibits the use of any unauthorized assistance. For this course, the use of text-generating artificial intelligence tools (such as but not limited to ChatGPT) is considered unauthorized assistance, and using it in connection with any assignment that you submit will be considered an Honor Code violation. This includes the use of generative AI for any stage of the work from conception to completion.

Exception to the AI Policy: Students are required to create and deliver a ten-minute in-class presentation. Students may use Artificial Intelligence to help create slides for use in the presentation.

Course of Study

M August 24 David Brooks, *How to Know a Person*, Chapters 1-4 (on Canvas)

W August 26 Patrick Radden Keefe, *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland*

M August 31 Patrick Radden Keefe, *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland*

Watch conversation between Anne Walker and Kathleen Gillespie

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMQMv0TELjI>

W September 2 *Making Sense of the Troubles*, Chapter 1 (on Canvas)

Listen to podcast with John Hume and David Trimble

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/john-hume-and-david-trimble-a-vision-of-peace/id1025864075?i=1000488332557>

M September 7 *Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland* (to be viewed in class).
Theories of Justice, Chapter 1

W September 9 *Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland* (to be viewed in class).
Theories of Justice, Chapter 2

M September 14 Guest Speaker: David Kitchen

Watch the following interview with Dr. Gary Mason.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdK-CJ43d78>

W September 16 Theories of Justice 3-4

M September 21 Theories of Justice 5-6

W September 23 Theories of Justice 7-8

Discuss approaches to paper 1

M September 28 *Richmond's Unhealed History*, Parts 1 and 2 (on Canvas)

W September 30 Class will not meet at the regular time.

Attend Weinstein-Rosenthal Forum with [Dr. Francis Collins](#).

7pm, Alice Jepson Theatre, Modlin Center for the Arts.

M October 6 Travel Prep Final Logistics

Watch "Derry Girls" episode in class.

Paper 1 Due

W October 7 *How the Monuments Came Down*

<https://www.pbs.org/video/how-the-monuments-came-down-widbkc/>

Travel to Northern Ireland Thursday, October 8 – Tuesday, October 13

W October 14 No Class

M October 19 Reflections on Northern Ireland

W October 21 Five Miles Away, A World Apart (on Canvas)
Discuss approaches to paper 2

M October 26 Our Kids
Introduction and Chapters 1-2

W October 28 Our Kids
Chapters 3-4
Discuss approaches to the presentation and paper 3

M November 2 Our Kids
Chapters 5-6 and conclusion

W November 4 Just Mercy
Chapters 1-8

Friday, November 6
Paper 2 due

M November 9 Just Mercy
Finish the Book

W November 11 No Class

M November 16 Presentations

W November 18 Presentations

M November 24 Thanksgiving Holiday

W November 26 Thanksgiving Holiday

M November 30 Presentations

W December 2 Presentations

W December 9 Paper 3 due by 5:00 p.m.

Course Papers

Paper 1 Prompt

- Task: Write Paper 1 on a contemporary justice-related issue in American society.
- Choose an issue such as healthcare disparities, immigration, child poverty, racial inequality, environmental crisis, etc.
- Narrow the issue to a specific context such as child poverty in Richmond, VA; climate change impacts on communities of color in a particular region; etc.
- Paper must include:
 - A clear, strong thesis statement.
 - At least three reputable sources (peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books or journals, government or NGO reports, credible news outlets).
 - A brief summary of the three approaches to justice covered in class:
 - Utilitarianism / Welfare
 - Libertarian / Rights-Based
 - Virtue and the Good Life
 - Use one of these theories, supported by your research, to propose a potential solution to the chosen issue.
- Length and format:
 - 1600–1800 words.
 - Follow format and citation guidelines in the syllabus.
 - Chicago style footnotes.

Paper 2 Prompt

- Task: Write a comparative paper on the social contexts of Richmond, Virginia and Northern Ireland.
- Purpose: Analyze similarities and differences in social, political, historical, or cultural dynamics between the two places.
- Evidence to use:
 - Draw heavily on course readings and materials.
 - Integrate insights and observations from the fall break travel experience to Northern Ireland.
 - You may also include additional reputable sources as needed
- Possible themes:
 - Struggle for civil rights
 - Opportunities and challenges of reconciliation and peace-making
 - Role of memorialization and impact of public memory
 - Segregation, spatial politics, and contested public spaces
 - Political institutions, governance, and community power
 - Identity, nationalism, and collective memory
- Paper requirements:
 - Develop a clear, well-developed thesis that frames the comparison/contrast.
 - Provide evidence-based analysis comparing Richmond and Northern Ireland across your chosen theme(s).
 - Assess implications for policy, reconciliation, justice, or community relations as appropriate.
 - Use Chicago style footnotes to cite all evidence including your own experience and observations.
- Format and length:
 - 1600–1800 words.

- Follow format and citation guidelines in the syllabus (include in-text citations and a references list).
- Submission:
 - Convert to PDF and email to the instructor.
 - Due: Friday, November 6 by 5:00 p.m.

Paper 3 Prompt

- Task: Write a systematic analysis of an organization working to address a specific social justice issue you want to help solve.
- The social problem must be substantially different from the one you covered in your first paper.
- Analysis requirements:
 - Describe the organization's stated goals, programs/activities, target population, and strategies for change.
 - Provide a systematic assessment of how the organization addresses the social justice issue (methods, theory of change, partnerships, resources).
 - Evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the organization's approach, with concrete examples and evidence.
 - Offer actionable suggestions for how the organization could be more effective at fulfilling its mission.
- Evidence and sources:
 - Draw on your own interests and relevant personal experience.
 - Incorporate multiple course readings (explicitly cite which readings you use).
 - Use at least five reputable sources beyond course materials (peer-reviewed articles, books, credible reports, major media, organizational documents).
 - Integrate insights from your travel experience to Northern Ireland and explain how those insights inform your analysis.
- Format and length:
 - Paper length: 1600–1800 words.
 - Follow the formatting and citation style specified in the syllabus (use the syllabus format for structure, headings, citations, and reference list).
 - Include in-text citations and a references list for all sources used.
 - Use evidence to support claims (data, evaluations, case examples).
 - Proofread for clarity, organization, and adherence to word count before converting to PDF.
- Submission details:
 - Due date/time: Wednesday, December 9 at 5:00 p.m.
 - Submit as a PDF emailed to the instructor.
 - This paper counts as your final exam.

Presentation Prompt

SSIR Fall 2026 Presentation Prompt

Description

- Develop and deliver a 10-minute slide presentation that offers a systematic analysis of an organization addressing a specific social justice issue you want to help solve.

- The social problem you select for this presentation must be substantially different from the problem you addressed in your first paper.
- Your presentation should synthesize the following: your interests and experience, multiple course readings, at least five reputable external sources beyond the class, and insights from the Northern Ireland travel experience.
- The presentation must identify and evaluate the organization's strengths and weaknesses in addressing the problem and offer concrete suggestions for improving its effectiveness in fulfilling its mission.

Deliverables and format

- A slide deck using the program of your choice.
- Maximum presentation time: 10 minutes.
- Aim for 8–12 slides.
- Cite sources on a final slide.

Content requirements:

- Clear statement of the social justice issue and why you chose it.
- Brief description of the organization.
- Evidence-based analysis drawing on:
 - Your own interests/experience.
 - Multiple course readings.
 - At least five reputable external sources beyond the course.
 - Relevant observations or lessons from the Northern Ireland travel experience.
- Assessment of the organization's strengths and weaknesses in addressing the issue.
- Recommendations to improve organizational effectiveness.
- Brief concluding synthesis: implications for practice, policy, or further research.

Jepson School of Leadership Studies Common Syllabus Insert

Awarding of Credit

To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.

registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html

Disability Accommodations

Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams.

disability.richmond.edu/

Weinstein Learning Center

The Center integrates, amplifies, and co-locates Speech Studio, Writing Studio, Quantitative and Programming Support, Content Tutoring, Academic Coaching, English Language and Culture, and Technology Studio services. The WLC aims to provide next-level academic support, transforming our students' development in integrated and innovative ways and complementing our robust curricular and co-curricular offerings.¹

<https://wlc.richmond.edu/>

Honor System

The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: "I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work."

<https://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/policies/honor/Honor-Code.pdf>

Religious Observance

Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.

registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html

Addressing Microaggressions on Campus

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.² Recent research has found that, when professors do not address microaggressions in class, microaggressions foster alienation of marginalized groups.³ Furthermore, both students and faculty that are exposed to microaggressions more often are more likely to have depressive symptoms and negative affect (a negative view of the world).⁴ A comfortable and productive environment where meaningful learning happens can be collectively created through actions, words, or environmental cues that promote the inclusion and success of marginalized members, recognizing their embodied identity, validating their realities, resisting sexism, ableism, and racism.⁵

The University of Richmond is committed to building an inclusive community. To this end, the [Hub for Student Inclusion and Community](#) was created in 2021 and offers ongoing support and assistance for a diverse student body.⁶ With this in mind, as a community member at the University of Richmond, I pledge to address microaggressions in the classroom by holding myself, other students, and faculty accountable for what is said and being receptive to criticism when perpetuating these slights, snubs, or insults.

¹<https://wlc.richmond.edu/>

²Sue, S., Zane, N., Nagayama Hall, G. C., & Berger, L. K. (2009). The Case for Cultural Competency in Psychotherapeutic Interventions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 525–548. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163651>

³Bergom, I., Wright, M.C., Brown, M.K. and Brooks, M. (2011), Promoting college student development through collaborative learning: A case study of *hevruta*. *About Campus*, 15: 19-25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.20044>

⁴Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S., & Rasmus, M. (2014). The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on Mental Health: Counseling Implications for Clients of Color. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(1), 57–66. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00130.x>

⁵Rolón-Dow, R. (2019). Stories of Microaggressions and Microaffirmation: A Framework for Understanding Campus Racial Climate. *NCID Currents*, 1(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/currents.17387731.0001.106>

⁶ <https://inclusion.richmond.edu/>