

## Restorative History: Building Peace after Collective Trauma

**Offered:** Fall  
**Instructor:** Brian Clark

**Discipline:** History

### **Abstract:**

Just as personal trauma can impact individuals, changing their minds and bodies, collective trauma can color and shape how groups of people experience reality and relate to one another. This course will inform our peacebuilding work through deepening our understanding of the effects of collective trauma and how to respond to it. This is a history course, but we will engage with ideas and methods drawn from theology, psychology, neurobiology, sociology, and literature as we seek to understand the enduring legacies of trauma and its impact on current relationships.

### **Critical Ideas:**

- Conflicts happen in the present, but they are nearly always rooted in the past, and past conflicts often deeply shape the identities of living people and how they relate to others. Conflicts that result in individual and collective trauma are particularly powerful in shaping people and their relationships.
- People carry trauma in their bodies, and they can pass trauma on to others around them and to their descendants. This can greatly interfere with the work of peacebuilding because collective and individual trauma can make it very difficult to form trusting relationships.
- The suffering caused by collective trauma, or intergenerational trauma, is often greatly worsened by historical narratives that rationalize or justify harms done, especially if the narratives are shameful and internalized by the victims or their descendants. There is a distinctive kind of damage done by historical narratives that deny the reality of collective traumas, (e.g. Holocaust denial, romanticized depictions of slavery in the Southern US).
- Collective identities and perceived possibilities are shaped by shared stories, especially shared stories about the past. Fostering progress toward peace and justice may require creative and adaptive ways of remembering the past.
- Cultures may have profoundly different ways of relating to the past, since some cultures (including many indigenous cultures such as Native American cultures) are strongly grounded in the past, while some cultures (including dominant American culture) are future oriented.

### **Relevant Program Learning Outcomes:**

- Describe past relations between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and how the past, and historical memory of that past, continues to influence interfaith relations.
- Critique your own faith's teachings, history, and leadership in terms of their contributions towards peace and their role in injustice.
- Explain the role of emotions, empathy, and trust in building relationships across lines of difference. Recognize the emotional components of reconciliation.

- Understand the biology and psychology of trauma, and how they affect the thinking and experience of traumatized individuals; understand how trauma complicates relationships, and by extension, relationship-based peacebuilding.
- Explain how large-scale violence, oppression, or calamity can create intergenerational and collective trauma and how those forms of trauma can affect the collective identities of groups and their capacity for constructive action.
- Analyze how past memories of violence, oppression, conflict, and trauma are captured in stories about the past, and explain how “right remembering” can become a tool of constructive peacebuilding.
- Explore the role of gratitude, joy, and hope in the development of personal resilience (or “inner peace”) and the relationship of such resilience to peacebuilding work. Recognize the temptation to allow “inner peace” to become code for complacency among the privileged.
- Interrogate your own biases and their impact on peacebuilding practices.
- Assess the role of storytelling in multiple relationship-building processes.
- Synthesize your learning about relationship-building processes with your own cultural and religious norms.

**Required Texts (Preliminary):**

*No Future Without Forgiveness*, Desmond Tutu, Image Books, New Ed. 2000, ISBN-10 : 0385496907

*Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, Serene Jones. Westminster John Knox Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 2019. ISBN-10 : 0664264778

*My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies*. Resmaa Menakem, MSW, Central Recovery Press, 2017. ASIN : B0727L1NGJ

*The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. Bessel van der Kolk. Penguin Books, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 2014. ISBN : 0143127748

*The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, John Paul Lederach. Oxford University Press, Reprint Ed. 2005. ASIN : B0058C6QEY