

Date: February 29, 2024

To: Felicia Song, Chair of the GE Committee

From: Alastair Su

Rationale for JRD for HIS 7 (United States to 1877)

HIS 7 is a survey course that covers the history of the United States from first encounters of Europeans and Native Americans through Reconstruction. One of its central themes is reckoning with the legacy of race and racism in the United States—especially as it relates to Christian contexts. For that reason, it is well-suited to meet the criteria for a JRD course.

Additionally, it should interest the GE committee that HIS 8, the other half of the US general history sequence, is already certified as a JRD course.

JRD CC #1. The first criterion requires students to “develop biblically and theologically grounded understandings of justice, reconciliation and diversity... in terms of the gospel and appropriate disciplinary frameworks.” HIS 7 begins by introducing a framework articulated by Robert Tracy McKenzie, a Wheaton historian, from the introduction to *The First Thanksgiving: What the Real Story Tells Us About Loving God and Learning from History*. Students read McKenzie’s essay and discuss what it means to think “Christianly and historically” (2013: 10). We then continue to discuss McKenzie’s ideas in relation to historical texts such as Mary Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* and Solomon Northup’s *Twelve Years A Slave* that grapple with Indian removal, slavery, and other issues concerning racial injustice in Christian contexts. The final week of the course culminates with an extended discussion of historical monuments such as the Emancipation Memorial in DC to help students “discern their responsibility in the work of justice and reconciliation within their own local context” as they think about the ongoing legacies of racial injustice in the United States.

JRD CC #2. The examination of “personal actions, social norms, and systemic patterns involving race and racism in the United States” forms a major emphasis of HIS 7. The course begins with the story of the European conquest of the Americas and moves swiftly into the arrival of chattel slavery in the colonial United States. Students then learn how, over a series of fits and starts, the case for abolition grew and culminated in the Civil War. My assignments and exams also have students reflect how Christians in America could simultaneously perpetrate and oppose slavery—a topic that has rich implications for the church today.

JRD CC #3. A core component of HIS 8 are “flashpoints.” These are role-playing exercises that have students revisit pivotal moments in US history, such as the Salem Witch Trials and the Virginia Secession Convention of 1861. Each flashpoint provides a prime opportunity for students to “model Christlike dialogue” while “confronting challenging or sensitive issues.” While some flashpoints might deal with the issue of race more explicitly than others (e.g. “The Emancipation Memorial”), students will learn of its perennial relevance.