

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Introduction to the Sanctuary Syllabus

by Molly Nolan



SCOTT RICHARD, *SANCTUARY CITY* (2017). PHOTOGRAPH BY TORBAKHOPPER / FLICKR

In 2017, President Donald Trump both banned entry into the United States by foreign nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries and repealed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) and thereby deprived 800,000 people of their right to work, study and remain in the U.S. Suddenly, issues of immigration, refugees, sanctuary and citizenship came to dominate national, municipal and university politics. In response, a coalition of NYU faculty and graduate students worked to protect our DACA and Muslim students and lobbied—without success—to make NYU a sanctuary campus that would protect undocumented and otherwise at risk students, staff and faculty. We also sought to learn more about these issues and help others learn and teach about them by putting together the Sanctuary Syllabus. Our syllabus explains the historical and structural causes of immigration, migration, and displacement in the US and globally, and explores the intellectual and social history of the sanctuary movement. It analyzes the regulation of citizenship and its effects on undocumented citizens as well as racially, religiously, and sexually marginalized groups. Finally, the syllabus offers resources and strategies for studying, organizing, and creating sanctuary. The syllabus brings together a variety of materials, some analytical, others artistic; some journalistic, others autobiographical. Every week offers examples of policies and tools for change and resistance. After completing the syllabus in the fall of 2017 and publishing it on the Public Book website, we decided we needed to teach the course right away, given the multiple crisis around migration, travel, DACA and sanctuary. Since we all had already committed to courses for the spring, we called on colleagues to join us in a team taught undergraduate course. Two dozen faculty from a variety of disciplines agreed. Each week two faculty gave half hour lectures with discussion and then the fifty students broke up into small groups to plan their collective projects, which were presented at the end of the semester. It was a rewarding experience for the very engaged students and for the faculty and graduate students who had a chance to hear about the amazing work their colleagues were doing. Unfortunately, the course has not been taught again as some of the main faculty retired or left for other schools and moved on to focus on other pressing political issues. Nonetheless, even under President Biden, the issues remain pressing as does the need to educate ourselves and teach others about them. And the format of a course taught with multiple teachers suggests how to address pressing political issues by drawing on diverse fields and wide expertise and how to recruit people to participate above their normal teaching load.

Here is the link to the Sanctuary Syllabus on the Public Books website: <https://www.publicbooks.org/sanctuary-syllabus/>



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