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Feminist and Womanist Ethics
Spring 2025
Schlegel 121
Tuesday, 6pm-8:50pm

“Society itself offers a graduate-level course in misogyny and every exam is a take-home test. The real work comes in consciously combating our bias and attempting to deprogram ourselves from blindly accepting privileges and ignorant oppressions.”

--Charles Blow
New York Times editorial 06/03/2019

“If I have to live in a racial house, it was important at least to rebuild it so that it was not a windowless prison into which I was forced, a thick-walled impenetrable container from which no sound could be heard, but rather an open house, grounded, yet generous in its supply of windows and doors. Or at the most, it became imperative for me to transform this house completely.”

--Toni Morrison
The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations (Knopf, 2019)

Course Description:

This course will center around the writings of contemporary Womanist ethicists, supplemented by videos and podcasts. This course fulfills the Black Church Studies requirement and counts as a Wisdom and Witness elective.

Objectives:

1. To acquaint students with the distinctive emphases and controversies of contemporary Womanist ethics
2. To encourage students to assess the relevance of this body of ethical reflection for the contemporary church and world.
3. To help students hone their own theological and ethical perspectives in dialogue with these resources.

This course is most closely related to these SLOs:

MDIV

SLO 3: Students will be able to think theologically and ethically in relation to particular traditions and contemporary needs.

SLO 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to reflect critically and self-critically on relationships between Christian faith and various forms of systemic injustice.

MAR

SLO3: Students will demonstrate an understanding of multiple theological perspectives, historical and contemporary

SLO4: Students will demonstrate the ability to think theologically, strategically, imaginatively, and contextually about ethical issues

MAMFT

SLO 5: Graduating students will be able to use a theologically informed and clinically appropriate framework to integrate religious and spiritual factors into the practice of Marriage and Family Therapy

MFT Developmental Competency Component 4: Awareness, knowledge, and skill to responsibly serve diverse Communities.

Anti-racism QEP/SLO (all degree programs):

Students can describe strategies, grounded in their practice, for working toward racial justice appropriate to their particular vocational settings. Students can demonstrate competence with this SLO in many ways including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Defining and using key terms in ways informed by an understanding of systemic racism.
2. Identifying racism in its many manifestations (structural, personal, communal, etc.)
3. Critical reflection on the history and current contexts regarding race, racism, and antiracism
4. Critical reflection on racist and antiracist practices and theologies
5. Developing and implementing antiracist policies, practices, and theologies

Requirements:

1. Conscientious attendance and participation in discussion. (25%)
Showing up with your reading done is an important component of your work in this course. Lack of attendance and of thorough and timely class preparation will adversely affect your course grade. Please inform the instructor ahead of time if you have to miss class. Since this course meets only once a week, more than one unexcused absence from class puts you in

danger of a low or failing grade in the course. Students will sign up to lead a “talk back” session during one class period. In this 30-minute session, students will lead class discussion by presenting either a theological/ethical disagreement with one of the readings for that day, or a way of extending them to address other contexts.

2. Journal questions (25%)

Students will record their responses to questions posed in the syllabus for each week in a journal, either paper or digital; these responses need be no longer than a paragraph. These should be done in time for each class session, so that we can draw on them in class. **The journal will be turned in twice, on March 11 and May 6 (by midnight).**

3. Reflection in conjunction with the LPTS Black Church Studies Consultation, February 25-28 (15%) **Due March 4 (by class time)**

Students will write a 250-word paper relating the Edwards lecture by Prof. Annemarie Mingo, “Can I Get a Witness?: Cultivating the Courage of Moral Leaders,” to one or more of the assigned readings for the week of February 25 and reflecting on its implications for our contemporary context. Dr. Mingo’s lecture will focus on “the faith, courage, and moral imagination of civil rights-era Black Churchwomen..., showcasing their public witness and courageous resistance to social injustice.”

Prof. Mingo’s lecture will be on Thursday, February 27, at 6:30pm in the Winn Center, with a reception and ministry resource fair beginning at 5:30pm. Students are encouraged to attend the lecture in person, since the Feminist and Womanist Ethics class will be cancelled that week. If this is not possible, the lecture may be listened to online. Students are also asked to attend at least one other event in the BCS Consultation.

4. Take-home exam or final paper (35%) **Due May 15 (by midnight)**

Take-home questions will be distributed on Tuesday, May 6. You will answer your choice of 3 questions (2-3 d.s. pp. each). This exam will give you opportunities to develop your own constructive statement on the ethical issues explored in this class. If you prefer instead to write a short research paper (6-7pp.) on a particular topic in feminist and womanist ethics, please set up an appointment to discuss this with the instructor.

LPTS CLASSROOM POLICIES:

As with all LPTS classes, this course will honor these Seminary policies:

Use of Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. For more information see:

<http://lpts.libguides.com/content.php?pid=469569&sid=4083885>

Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God,

you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God.

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center.

Citation Policy

Citations in your papers should follow the Seminary standard, which is based on these guides:

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010.

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

The Chicago Manual of Style. 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

Special Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center (bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu) during the first two days of class (or, even better, before the class begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

Required Text:

Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader, eds. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Westminster John Knox, 2011). Readings from this text will be in CAPS in the Course Calendar, e.g. TOWNES, ch. 3. All other readings, as well as video and podcast links, will be on CANVAS.

Course Calendar

Tuesday, February 11: Introduction to the course

We will watch “Journey to Liberation: Womanist Theology and Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York” in class (LPTS library DVD 328)

Read: Kelly Brown Douglas, “Twenty Years a Womanist,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*

Tuesday, February 18: The origins and development of Womanist thought

Read: TOWNES, ch. 3

Emilie Townes, “The Womanist Dancing Mind,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*

Kelly Brown Douglas, “Womanist Theology: What is its Relation to Black Theology?,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. II

Marcia Riggs, “The Logic of Interstructured Oppression: A Black Womanist Perspective,” in *Redefining Sexual Ethics: A Sourcebook of Essays, Stories, and Poems*

Monica Coleman, *Ain’t I a Womanist Too? Third Wave Womanist Religious Thought*, excerpts

Melanie Harris, “Womanist Humanism: A New Hermeneutic,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*

Cheryl Sanders et al., “Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective,” in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (Fall 1989)

Journal Question: What factors motivated the original development of Womanist thought, and how has it evolved?

Tuesday, February 25

Class will not meet this week because of the BCS Consultation. Please attend the Edwards lecture (Thursday, February 27, 6:30pm) and at least one other event in the Consultation.

Read: RIGGS, ch. 2, TOWNES, ch. 11, CANNON, ch. 14, RIGGS, ch. 15

Write: 250-word paper relating the Edwards lecture by Prof. Annemarie Mingo, “Can I Get a Witness?: Cultivating the Courage of Moral Leaders,” to one or more of the assigned readings above, and reflecting on its implications for our contemporary context. **Due March 4**

Tuesday, March 4 Sexual Ethics

Read: GILKES, ch. 6, COPELAND, ch. 7, BROWN DOUGLAS, ch. 8

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power in Sexuality and the Sacred," in *Sexuality and the Sacred*

Pamela Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology*, chs. 1, 5, and 7

Cheryl Sanders, "Sexual Orientation and Human Rights Discourse in the African-American Churches," in *Sexual Orientation and Human Rights in American Religious Discourse*

Katie Cannon, "Sexing Black Women: Liberation from the Prisonhouse of Anatomical Authority," in *Sexuality and the Sacred*

Laurel Schneider, "What if it is a choice? Some Implications of the Homosexuality Debates for Theology," in *Sexuality and the Sacred*

We will watch in class: *Taking the Long Road Home*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u66Kx4kf7Ls> (36 min.)

Journal Question: Imagine how Katie Cannon or Kelly Brown Douglas might respond to the ethical argument about Black sexuality presented by Cheryl Sanders.

Tuesday, March 11 Reproductive Justice

Read: SisterSong, "What is Reproductive Justice?" <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice>

Kimala Price, "What is Reproductive Justice?"

Michele Goodwin, "No, Justice Alito, Reproductive Justice is in the Constitution" <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/26/opinion/justice-alito-reproductive-justice-constitution-abortion.html>

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "How Black Feminists Defined Abortion Rights" *The New Yorker*, February 22, 2022 <https://www.newyorker.com/news/essay/how-black-feminists-defined-abortion-rights>

Jia Tolentino, "Is Abortion Sacred?"

Listen: Gloria Purvis and Cherilyn Hollaway, "Pro-Black and Pro-Life" <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2022/01/20/pro-black-pro-life-march-life-242245>

Journal Question: How does the reproductive justice framework relate to and transcend the mainstream “pro-choice” vs “pro-life” argument about abortion? **NOTE: JOURNALS ARE DUE TODAY**

Tuesday, March 18 NO CLASS: Research and Study

Tuesday, March 25 Reflections on Womanism by other women of color

Read: Karen Baker-Fletcher, “A Womanist Journey,” in *Deeper Shades of Purpose: Womanism in Religion and Society*

Kwok Pui-Lan, “Womanist visions, Womanist spirit: An Asian Feminist’s Response,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*

Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “Womanists and Mujeristas, Sisters in the Struggle,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*

Daisy Machado, “The Unnamed Woman: Justice, Feminism, and the Undocumented Woman,” in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*

Leticia Guardiola-Saenz, “Reading from Ourselves: Identity and Hermeneutics among Mexican-American feminists” in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*

Journal Question: How are the concerns of Asian and Latina women in the United States both similar to and distinct from those of Womanists?

Tuesday, April 1 Biblical Interpretation, part 1

Read: WEEMS, ch. 4

Gay Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, “Methods and the Making of Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, 1-18

Wil Gafney, “A Reflection on the Black Lives Matter Movement and Its Impact on my Scholarship,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* vol. 136, no. 1 (2017)

Renita Weems, “To Think Better than We’ve Been Trained,” in *Bitter the Chastening Rod: Africana Biblical Interpretation after Stony the Road We Trod in the Age of BLM, SayHerName, and MeToo*

Wil Gafney, “Women of the Torah and the Throne,” in *Womanist Midrash*

Mitzi Smith, “What, then, is the Church?” A Womanist Biblical Scholar’s Response [“What, then, is the Church?”: A Womanist Biblical Scholar’s Response | Columbia Theological Seminary \(ctsnet.edu\)](https://www.ctsnet.edu/what-then-is-the-church/)

We will watch in class: Wil Gafney, "White Supremacy in Biblical Interpretation" (9 min.)
<https://tcu.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=46a73b05-e779-435e-b08f-ac2e016651a8>

Journal Question: What are some central concerns in Womanist biblical interpretation?

Tuesday, April 8 Literature as Source for Womanist Ethics

NOTE: Class will not meet this week. Students are encouraged to attend the Grawemeyer lecture

Read: Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," in *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations*, 161-197

Emilie Townes, "With Running Mouth and Hands on Hip," in *Faith + Feminism: Ecumenical Essays*, 233-243

Katie Cannon, "Moral Wisdom in the Black Women's Literary Tradition," in *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, 57-68

Listen: [Words for the People: Reclaiming joy – 89.3 WFPL News Louisville](#), featuring Kentucky Poet Laureate Crystal Wilkinson and author Tracey Michae'l Lewis-Giggits. Listen up to the break at 26:38.

Journal Question: Why is Black literature an important source for Womanist ethics?

Tuesday, April 15 Biblical Interpretation, part 2

Read: Kamilah Hall Sharp, "Leah and Dinah in the Face of Abuse," in *Bitter the Chastening Rod: Africana Biblical Interpretation after Stony the Road We Trod in the Age of BLM, SayHerName, and MeToo*

Wil Gafney, "Exodus: These are not all the names," in *Womanist Midrash*

Mitzi Smith, "Race, Gender, and the Politics of 'Sass': Reading Mark 7:24-30 through a Womanist Lens of Intersectionality and Inter(con)textuality," in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*

Margaret Aymer, "Outrageous, Audacious, Courageous, Willful: Reading the Enslaved Girl of Acts 12," in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*

Wil Gafney, "A Womanist Midrash on Delilah," in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*

Marlene Underwood, “Battered Love’: Exposing Abuse in the Book of Job,” in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*

Journal Question: What is ethically valuable about the ways Womanist interpreters approach particular biblical texts?

March 17-18 Easter Recess

Tuesday, April 22 Systemic Black Suffering and Structural Injustice

Read: COPELAND, ch. 9, SIMS, ch. 12, SIMS, ch. 16

Brown Douglas, “The Black Body: A Guilty Body,” in *Stand your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, 48-89

Nikia Smith Robert, “Not Meant to Survive: Black Mothers Leading Beyond the Criminal Line,” in *Walking through the valley: womanist explorations in the spirit of Katie Geneva Cannon*

Watch: Watch: video introducing the Breonna’s Garden project:

[Breonna’s Garden | VOA Connect - YouTube](#) (6 min.)

NOTE: the readings for this week are emotionally difficult. Prioritize your sense of well-being over being fully prepared for class.

We will watch in class: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “ From #BlackLives Matter to Black Liberation” (15 min.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyE5nI1nRJI>

Journal Question: Write a prayer or lament about the endemic violence facing African Americans.

Tuesday, April 29 Ecowomanism

Read: BAKER-FLETCHER, ch. 5

Delores Williams, “Sin, Nature and Black Women’s Bodies,” in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*

Melanie Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*, chs. 3 and 6

Faith B. Harris, “Rooted Woman and Root Woman: One Black Woman’s Story at the Intersection of Earth, Faith, and Action,” in *Walking through the valley: womanist explorations in the spirit of Katie Geneva Cannon*

We will watch in class: Melanie Harris, “Making the Connections” (14 min)
<https://youtu.be/M7vsZp92yqU>

Journal Question: According to Harris, why is an earth-honoring faith important to African American women?

Tuesday, May 6 Sharing the Vision

Read: BAKER-FLETCHER, ch. 10, GILKES, ch. 13

Eboni Marshall Turman, “Black Women’s Faith, Black Women’s Flourishing” in *Christian Century* 2/28/2019

Watch: Introduction to Yolanda Norton’s Beyoncé Mass (5 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXci-sRayAQ>

Listen: Choose one additional resource on the Beyoncé Mass:

30-minute podcast: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUGib30hmPo>

12-minute interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eP8EJc-IU>

Journal Question: What is the most important thing you will bring away from this course?

NOTE: JOURNALS ARE DUE TODAY. Questions for the take-home will be distributed in class.

Tuesday, May 13 Take-homes and final papers are due by midnight.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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