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Office: 215 Gardencourt

Feminist and Womanist Ethics
Fall 2022
Gardencourt 206
Thursday 8:30-11:20 am

“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.

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 failing the course. Students will sign up to lead a “talk back” session in coordination with another classmate for 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 should 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 October 27 and December 8 (by midnight).

3. Letter on abortion (15%) **Due October 6 (by class time)**

Students will write a letter (at least 250 words) addressing the topic of abortion in conversation with one or more class readings. Students may choose whom to address in this letter: a newspaper editor, a friend or family member, a client, a religious congregation, etc. Students should be prepared to talk about their letter in class on October 6, but will not be required to share the text of their letter with classmates.

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

Take-home questions will be distributed on Thursday, November 17. 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. For more information, see The Code of Student Conduct, 6.11; the Student Handbook, p. 19.

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

Thursday, September 8: 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: Alice Walker, Definition of a *Womanist* from *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens* (1983)

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

Thursday, September 15: 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?

Thursday, September 22 White Feminist Classics

Read: Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father"

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/after-death-god-father>

Beverly Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love: Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers," in *Making the Connections*

Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist theology in Theological Education," in *New Feminist Christianity: Many voices, Many Views*

Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Semitism; The Unacknowledged Racism," in *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics*

Carter Heyward, "Coming Out: Journey without Maps," *Christianity and Crisis* (June 11, 1979) <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=429>

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

Journal Question: What are some of the pressing ethical concerns for white feminism, and what concerns do you perceive to be missing?

Thursday, September 29 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*

Watch: *Taking the Long Road Home*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u66Kx4kf7Ls> (36 min.)

Journal Question: Choose a figure from the video to bring into conversation with one or more of the readings regarding what Cheryl Gilkes calls "the loves and troubles" of sexuality and embodiment in African-American communities

Thursday, October 6 Reproductive Justice

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

Kimela 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>

Additional Resource:

Statistics on abortion in the United States from the Guttmacher Institute: [Roe v. Wade Overturned: Our Latest Resources | Guttmacher Institute](#)

Journal Question: How does the reproductive justice framework relate to and transcend the mainstream "pro-choice" vs "pro-life" argument about abortion?

Note: Have your letter on abortion available in class.

Thursday, October 13 Restorative practices for the anti-racist journey, with special guest Chandra Irvin

Read: Karen Baker-Fletcher, "A Womanist Journey," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: 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: Describe an experience that has shaped your understanding of race.

October 16-21 Research & Study

No class

Thursday, October 27 Literature as Source for Womanist Ethics

No class

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?

Note: Journals are due by midnight.

Thursday, November 3 Biblical Interpretation

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 \(ctsnet.edu\)](#)

Watch: 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?

Thursday, November 10 Biblical Interpretation 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?

Thursday, November 17 Violence

Lynching and Black Suffering

Read: COPELAND, ch. 9

TOWNES, ch. 11

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

Watch: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "From #BlackLives Matter to Black Liberation" (15 min.)
[From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation | Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor | TEDxBaltimore - Bing video](#)

Two videos introducing the Breonna's Garden project:

[Breonna's Garden | Art Loft - YouTube](#) (4 min.)

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

Additional Resources:

The Breonna's Garden app is available to download in the App Store.

A panel discussion of the making of the Breonna's Garden immersive experience is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZn8HAKsVys>

Journal Question: What connections do you draw between lynching and more recent forms of violence against African-Americans, including the murder of Breonna Taylor?

Note: Take-home questions will be distributed today. Take-home exams are due December 15.

November 24-25 Thanksgiving Break

No class

Thursday, December 1 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

Watch: 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?

Thursday, December 8 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 by midnight.

Thursday, December 15

Take-homes and final papers are due by midnight.

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