

Feminist and Womanist Ethics
Spring 2020
Amy Plantinga Pauw
Gardencourt 206
T/R 1:30-2:50 pm

“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 focus the writings of contemporary womanist ethicists. These will be complemented by other feminist writings. This course fulfills the Black Church Studies course 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.

Requirements for 3 credits:

1. Conscientious attendance and participation in discussion. (20%)
Showing up with your reading and 50-word sentence 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 me ahead of time if you have to miss class.
2. 50-word sentences (20%)
*Students will record their response to the **Question** posed in the syllabus for each class's reading; these will take the form of one 50-word sentence (see example below). You will e-mail these short assignments to amypauw@lpts.edu by 9:00 pm on the day before the class for which they are assigned, and they will be returned back to you the following Tuesday. *We will**

often start a class session by reading some of these aloud. The sentences will focus on the content of the readings. **You are required to do 8 sentences.**

Example:

50-Word Sentence Question: What connections can be drawn between lynching and other forms of African-American oppression and suffering?

50-Word Sentence Answer: Lynching arose post-Reconstruction and reflected White fear of Black insurrection, functioning as a means of punishment and intimidation to the advantage of Whites when no “systemic laws” against Blacks existed; today’s systemic laws and social institutions function in much the same way, keeping Whites dominant and comfortable, and Blacks invisible and controlled.

3. Oral exam (20%) **on Tuesday, April 14, 2020**

In lieu of a regular class session, students will be divided into small groups to meet with me for 20 minutes each to discuss this quotation from Marcia Riggs, “Living as Religious Ethical Mediators” (ch. 15 in our textbook, p. 250):

“The *imago Dei* in each of us must not be relegated to something essentially human nor to a way of relating to one another that is contingent on our ability to transcend or ignore our embodied differences.”

Reflect on your own experience of “cross-cultural encounters” in light of Riggs’s thesis.

4. Take-home exam. (40%) **Due Friday, May 8, 2020**

Questions will be distributed on Thursday, April 16. 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 on a particular topic in feminist and womanist ethics, please set up an appointment to discuss this with me.

LPTS CLASSROOM POLICIES:

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

Course Policies:

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 Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

Citation Policy: Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are 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.

Accessibility and Accommodation: Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester 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.

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. 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. More discussion about inclusive language can be accessed from the Academic Support Center and from the section of the LPTS web site with information for current students.

Policy on late work: *All written assignments are due on the date given in the syllabus. Late 50-word sentences will not be accepted. Course papers submitted late will be penalized in the grading by one letter grade increment for every day (a B+ paper becomes a B if one day late, a B- if two days, a C+ if three days, etc.). Assignments submitted more than ten days after the due date will not be accepted.*

Use of electronic devices in class: I ask that you create a time and space in the classroom to set aside such distractions as email, Facebook, and texting in order to engage our minds and hearts. Do not send or read text messages during class. In the event that you have a legitimate need to be accessible during class, you may ask us for an exception to this rule. You may not access the Internet during class time. Any misuse of electronic devices during class time, including checking of email or social networking sites, will be grounds for dismissal from the session and will negatively affect your course grade.

Attendance Policy

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned

absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Four or more absences may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

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. All other readings will be on CAMS.

Course Calendar

Thursday, February 6: Introduction to the course

We will watch “Journey to Liberation: Womanist Theology and Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York”

Tuesday, February 11: The Origin and Development of Womanist Discourse

Readings: TOWNES, ch. 3

Kelly Brown Douglas, “Womanist Theology: What is its Relation to Black Theology?,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. II, 290-299.

Marcia Riggs, “The Logic of Interstructured Oppression: A Black Womanist Perspective,” in *Redefining Sexual Ethics: A Sourcebook of Essays, Stories, and Poems*, 97-102.

50-word Sentence Question: How is womanist thought distinguished from both black theology and white feminism?

Thursday, February 13: Toni Morrison as Source for Womanist Ethics

Readings: 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

50-word Sentence Question: Why is black literature an important source for womanist ethics?

Tuesday, February 18: White Feminist Classics

Readings: Mary Daly, “After the Death of God the Father”
<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/after-death-god-father>

Beverly Harrison, “Keeping Faith in a Sexist Church: Not for Women Only,” in *Making the Connections*, 206-234.

Beverly Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love: Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers," in *Making the Connections*, 3-21

Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist theology in Theological Education," in *New Feminist Christianity: Many voices, Many Views*, 11-20

50-word Sentence Question: Why does Harrison reject Daly's approach to overcoming sexism?

Thursday, February 20: Black Church Studies Consultation

No class: please attend at least one event of the BCS Consultation

50-word Sentence Question: What connections do you see between the event you attended and the concerns of Womanist Ethics?

Tuesday, February 25: Challenges to Womanist Thought

Readings: Monica Coleman, *Ain't I a Womanist Too? Third Wave Womanist Religious Thought*, pp. 12-27 and ch. 12

Cheryl Sanders et al., "Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Fall 1989, 83-112.

50-word Sentence Question: What are Sanders's and Coleman's criticisms of mainstream womanist ethics and theology? Are there ways in which these two scholars agree?

Thursday, February 27: Womanist Biblical Interpretation 1

Readings: 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 Womanist Midrash on Delilah," in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, 49-72

Marlene Underwood, "'Battered Love': Exposing Abuse in the Book of Job," in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, 165-184

50-word Sentence Question: What are distinctive methods/themes in womanist biblical interpretation?

Tuesday, March 3: Womanist biblical Interpretation 2

Readings: Yolanda Norton, "Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible" Read and watch clips at <https://sfts.edu/beyonce-the-hebrew-bible-2/>

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*, 95-112

Margaret Aymer, "Outrageous, Audacious, Courageous, Willful: Reading the Enslaved Girl of Acts 12," in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, 265-289

50-word Sentence Question: Why Beyoncé?

Thursday, March 5: Lynching and Black Suffering

Readings: COPELAND, ch. 9

TOWNES, ch. 11

SIMS, ch. 12

50-word Sentence Question: What is the ethical significance of Ida B. Well's work to document lynching?

Tuesday, March 10: Lynching and Police Violence

Readings: SIMS, ch. 16

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

50-word Sentence Question: What connections can be drawn between lynching and other forms of African-American oppression and suffering?

Thursday, March 12: Where is there hope?

Readings: BAKER-FLETCHER, ch. 10

GILKES, ch. 13

Diana Hayes, "No Crystal Stair: Womanist Spirituality," chs. 4, 7, 8

50-word Sentence Question: Where do Baker-Fletcher, Hayes, and Gilkes find hope in the midst of suffering?

MARCH 16-20: RESEARCH & STUDY – NO CLASS

MARCH 23-27: Student training for transition to online classes. Please also use this week to read ahead for the following weeks and be in touch with your oral exam group.

Tuesday, March 31 Feminist Understandings of Sexual Identity

Readings: Laurel Schneider, "What if it is a choice? Some Implications of the Homosexuality Debates for Theology," in Marvin Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas, eds., *Sexuality and the Sacred*, 2nd ed., 197-204

Heyward, Carter. "Coming Out: Journey without Maps," *Christianity and Crisis*, June 11, 1979: 153-6. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=429>

Hunt, Mary E. "Eradicating the Sin of Heterosexism," in Marvin Ellison and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Heterosexism in Contemporary World Religion*, 155-176
Also available online: http://www.pucsp.br/rever/rv2_2005/p_hunt.pdf

50-word Sentence Question: What are the ethical implications of questioning whether sexual identity is something innate?

Thursday, April 2: Womanist Understandings of Embodiment and Sexual Identity

Readings: BROWN DOUGLAS, ch. 8

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power in Sexuality and the Sacred," in *Sexuality and the Sacred*, 73-77

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*, 178-184.

50-word Sentence Question: How might Lightsey respond to Sanders's "acceptance without advocacy" stance on the presence of queer people in the black church?

Tuesday, April 7: Womanist Understandings of Embodiment and Sexual Identity

Readings: GILKES, ch. 6

COPELAND, ch. 7

Katie Cannon, "Sexing Black Women: Liberation from the Prisonhouse of Anatomical Authority," in *Sexuality and the Sacred*, 78-94

Leola A. Johnson, "The Spirit Is Willing and So Is the Flesh: The Queen in Hip-Hop Culture" in *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music*, 154-70

Traci West, "A Space for Faith, Sexual Desire, and Ethical Black Ministerial Practices," in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, 31-50

50-word Sentence Question: How has white racism distorted black women's sexuality?

50-word Sentence Question: What vision of black women's sexuality do these authors seek to promote?

Thursday, April 9: EASTER BREAK – NO CLASS

Tuesday, April 14: Oral Exams

"The *imago Dei* in each of us must not be relegated to something essentially human nor to a way of relating to one another that is contingent on our ability to transcend or ignore our embodied differences."

Marcia Riggs, "Living as Religious Ethical Mediators" (ch. 15 in our textbook, p. 250).

Reflect on your own experience of "cross-cultural encounters" in light of Riggs's thesis.

Thursday, April 16: Ecowomanism

Readings: BAKER-FLETCHER, ch. 5

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

50-word Sentence Question: According to Harris, why is an earth-honoring faith important to African American Women?

Tuesday, April 21: Expanding the Conversation: American Jewish Feminism

Readings: Cynthia Ozick, "Notes towards Finding the Right Question," in *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, 120-151

Judith Plaskow, "Setting the Problem, Laying the Ground," in *Sexuality and the Sacred*, 16-33

Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Semitism; The Unacknowledged Racism," in *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics*, 94-99

50-word Sentence Question: Why does Plaskow see anti-Semitism as "the unacknowledged racism"?

Thursday, April 23: Expanding the Conversation: American Muslim Feminism

Readings: Hibba Abugideiri, "Speaking from Behind the Veil: does Islamic Feminist Exist?," in *Faith + Feminism: Ecumenical Essays*, 115-134

Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "The Emergence of Muslim American Feminisms," in *Faith + Feminism: Ecumenical Essays* 135-160

50-word Sentence Question: How does western Islamophobia complicate claiming a feminist identity for American Muslims?

Tuesday, April 28: Expanding the Conversation: Latina Christian Feminism

Readings: Nancy Pineda-Madrid, "Latina Feminist Theology: Charting Future Discourse," in *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views*, 11-20

Daisy Machado, "The Unnamed Woman: Justice, Feminism, and the Undocumented Woman," in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 161-176

Leticia Guardiola-Saenz, "Reading from Ourselves: Identity and Hermeneutics among Mexican-American feminists" in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 80-97

50-word Sentence Question: How are Latina and womanist ethical concerns similar? How are they different?

Thursday, April 3: Expanding the Conversation: Asian Feminisms

Readings: Jane Naomi Iwamura, "Ancestral Returns: Reexamining the Horizons of Asian American Religious Practice," in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, 107-121

Gale Yee, "She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn": Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority," in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, 45-65

Kwok Pui-Lan, "Womanist visions, Womanist spirit: An Asian Feminist's Response," in Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, ed. *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ch. 16.

50-word Sentence Question: What are some distinctive ethical challenges faced by Asian women?

Tuesday, May 5: Expanding the Conversation: African Christian Feminism

Readings: Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Do You Understand What You Are Reading?," in *Faith + Feminism: Ecumenical Essays*, 217-232

Teresia Mbari Hinga, "The Dialogical Imperative," in *African, Christian, Feminist: The Enduring Search for What Matters*, 18-37

50-word Sentence Question: What are some distinctive ethical concerns of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians?

Thursday, May 7: Sharing the Vision

Readings: Eboni Marshall Turman, "Black Women's Faith, Black Women's Flourishing" in *Christian Century* 2/28/2019

50-word Sentence Question A: What are some new directions for womanist thought?

50-word Sentence Question B: What is the most important thing you will bring away from this course?

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