

Introduction to Black Church Studies

LOUISVILLE PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Winter 2016 Intensive

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed to provide an overview of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary components of the Black Christian experience in America so that students who are called to lead contemporary African American churches might have an introduction to the rich historical, theological, ethical, and sociological foundations of that experience from an academic perspective as a foundation for ministry and church leadership. It is also designed so that all students have a framework by which to understand the complexities of the Black Christian experience in America and appreciate the diversity that contextualized theology, praxis and worship of the Black Church provides for the greater-Christian community.

II. TEXTBOOKS:

Required Reading (30% or more of the text is read for course work):

Floyd-Thomas, Stacey, Juan Floyd-Thomas, Carol B. Duncan, Stephen G. Jr Ray, and Nancy Lynne Westfield. *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0687332656

Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend. *If It Wasn't for the Women...: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community*. Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2000. ISBN: 978-1570753435

Pinn, Anthony B. *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2002. ISBN: 978-1570754234

Warnock, Raphael. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness*. New York: NYU Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-0814794463

Wise, Tim. *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity*. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2010. ISBN: 978-0872865082

Recommended Reading (less than 30% of text is read for the course work or for enrichment):

Andrews, Dale P. *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology & African American Folk Religion*. 1 edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

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Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2015.

Metzger, Paul Louis, John M. Perkins, and Donald Miller. *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007.

Murphy, Larry G. *Down by the Riverside: Readings in African American Religion*. New York: NYU Press, 2000.

Watkins, Ralph Basui, and Justin G. West. *The Future of the African American Church: An Invitation to Dialogue*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2014.

III. RATIONALE:

This course meets one of the requirements for the inclusion of a Black Church Studies course in all of the Master's programs. This course is designed to provide an overview of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary components of the Black Christian experience in America so that students who are called to lead contemporary African American churches might have an introduction to the rich historical, theological, ethical, and sociological foundations of that experience from an academic perspective as a foundation for ministry and church leadership. It is also designed so that all students have a framework by which to understand the complexities of the Black Christian experience in America and appreciate the diversity that contextualized theology, praxis and worship of the Black Church provides for the greater-Christian community such that the following Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) are met:

- *SLO3: Students will demonstrate an understanding of multiple theological perspectives, historical and contemporary.*
- *SLO4: Students will demonstrate an understanding of their denominational heritage.*
- *SLO7: Students will give evidence that they are conscious of multiple forms of oppression and injustice, including sexism, patriarchy, classism, heterosexism and poverty and able to identify strategies for responding to them.*
- *SLO8: Students will demonstrate the ability to think theologically, strategically, imaginatively, and contextually about ethical issues.*

IV. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

In order to meet these general objectives stated above, students will demonstrate the following specific competencies. At the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Articulate a general understanding of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary components of the Black Christian experience in America that includes the rich historical, theological, ethical, and sociological foundations of that experience from an academic perspective as a foundation for ministry and church leadership.

2. Articulate how the theological, historical, ethical and sociological foundations of the Black Church experience in America provides a lens by which they conscious of multiple forms of oppression and injustice, including sexism, patriarchy, classism, heterosexism and poverty; and are able to identify strategies by which to meet instances of them in their current and contemporary ministry settings.
3. Articulate theologically, strategically, imaginatively how the Black Church experience in America informs their theologies and practices of ministry and church leadership within their own contexts.

V. TEACHING STRATEGIES:

This course will combined assigned readings with lecture, class discussion, individual presentations, video examples, and some field trips with regard to the Black Church experience in America in relation to popular culture and to the assigned readings. Most importantly, we will strive in the course to relate students' context of ministry the course in such a way as to allow time for personal and group reflection on praxis, as well as to allow the course to serve to inform praxis.

This course is an intensive course. Students will complete readings and writing assignments before and after attending Winter Intensive class session and submit all assignments through CAMS. Students are also expected to attend the entire Winter Intensive session, including in-class and field trips. Questions concerning CAMS should be directed to the Steve Cook at scook@lpts.edu. All correspondence concerning the course will take place through a student's LPTS email account and students are expected to check that email regularly.

VI: SEMINARY STANDARDS:

A. Inclusive language

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary has an official policy regarding the use of Inclusive Language. The policy may be found in the Seminary Catalog and further explained in the Student Handbook. If you have specific questions, please see the instructor.

B. Academic Integrity

Student integrity regarding all work assigned in this class is a basic expectation of the Seminary community. A detailed policy regarding what constitutes a violation of academic integrity can be found in the Student Handbook.

C. Online Confidentiality

One of the highlights of the online classroom is that students can draw from the experiences shared during class discussions and in written work. However, it is imperative that students do not share information that is confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature. In addition, students are expected to honor the privacy and confidentiality of their classmates by not disclosing online conversations with those outside of the classroom.

VII. CLASS SCHEDULE

Class meets Monday, January 11, 2016 – Friday, January 15, 2016 from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. There will be appropriate breaks for meals, group work, final projects, etc.

Class Topics:

Monday, January 11, 2016: *Overview of Major Themes/Components in the Black Church Studies*

Tuesday, January 12, 2016: *Understanding the Impact of Black Women, Both Clergy and Lay*

Wednesday, January 13, 2016: *Black Church Studies in Community – Bates Memorial Baptist Church and Community Development Corporation for Meetings, Worship, Community Involvement (TENTATIVE).*

Thursday, January 14, 2016: *Understanding the Impact of Ontological Blackness, Colorblindness and Post-Racial Rhetoric on Black Church Studies*

Friday, January 15, 2016: *Understanding the “Divided Mind” of the Black Church: Academics v. Practical Church Ministry*

VIII. ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION:

A. Assignments

1. Targeted Critical Inquiries (5 at 10 pts per Summary for a Total of 50% of Grade)

- a) **Critical inquiries should be a minimum of 1000 words (2 -3 pages) for Masters students and a minimum of 2000 words (5 pages) for DMin students.** They are to follow the requirements for written assignments below. Do not include a cover page. Simply put your first and last name at the top and the title of the volume you will be summarizing as follows:

Felicia LaBoy, *God of the Oppressed*

- b) The next line should be the beginning of your critical summary. Critical inquiries should:
 - 1) Provide a narrative overview of the readings. Strive for balance throughout rather than focusing your summary on one or two chapters of the book. The primary aim is to set out the big picture.
 - 2) Do not use lengthy quotations from the book. Rather summarize them in your own words and footnote the reference. The purpose of the inquiries and papers are to add your voice to an ongoing conversation and to increase your learning, they are not to “proof-text” your point.

- 3) If you do reference *specific* pages in the book, include those page numbers in parenthesis (do not include the title and/or author). No other sources should be consulted or referenced.
- 4) In the last ½ page (approx. 200-250 words), you may raise questions and make critical observations about the book.
- 5) Remember: Avoid “church-eze” or “sermonizing” in your inquiries. Your papers are not sermons, but academic papers that demonstrate you understand the author’s main argument from her point of view and then critically engage the argument from your perspective.

c) Critical Inquiry Topics and Due Dates:

1. Critical Summary 1: *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*, Due: Monday, January 11, 2016 at beginning of class.

- a. Read *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* – entirety
- b. Focus your critical inquiry based on the following questions:

Based on the readings, what are the strengths and weaknesses of Black Church perspectives on religious history, bible theology, ethics and praxis (i.e., Christian education, worship, preaching, and ministry)? How might Black Church history and traditional and contemporary perspectives from the Black Church with regard to bible, theology, ethics and Christian education inform/correct contemporary Black Church ministry? How does Black Church perspectives on religious history, bible, theology, ethics and praxis serve to inform or act as a corrective/supplement to those persons and ministries called to minister to non-Black persons in ways that are beyond dialog, understanding or ethno-tourism (i.e., to engage in the study of persons/cultures that are different from one’s own without seeking to be shaped by the encounter)?

2. Critical Summary 1: *If It Weren’t For The Women*, Due: Tuesday, January 12, 2016

- a. Read *If It Weren’t For the Women* – entirety
- b. Focus your critical inquiry based on the following questions:

Cheryl Townsend Gilkes makes bold claims about the indispensability of African American women in Black religious, political and communal life. Her book also discusses at length how race, class and gender came to fore when examining the religious, political, family and community lives of Black women specifically in relation to white women and Black men. Primarily, Gilkes maintains that to understand the commitment of Black religious women one must always consider their communal commitments – a theme echoed in the term “womanist” which pioneering Black female theologians claimed as their own in describing how they dealt with theology at the intersection of race, class and gender. What do you think of Gilkes’ claims? Specifically, is Gilkes correct when she parses out the indispensability of black religious women to the church, community,

and academy? How so? How might the religious work of Black women in the church, political arena, community and the academy inform not only Black churches, but the Church universal?

3. Critical Summary 3: *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat From Racial Equity*, Due: Friday, January 14, 2016

- a. Read *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity* – Preface and Chapter 2
- b. Focus your critical inquiry based on the following questions:

Wise utilizes the phrase “post-racial liberalism” to describe the current state of affairs in terms of racial equity and social justice. Describe the strengths and weaknesses of his use of the phrase and its limitations in helping society move beyond the racial conundrum in which it currently finds itself. Further, Wise is a critical race theorist and anti-racism activist who in no way describes his work in theological ways. How might this work on post-racial liberalism provide insight into Black Church Studies for both congregations that minister directly to African American people (i.e., the Black Church) and to Christianity at large?

4. Critical Summary 4: *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, Due: Wednesday, January 20, 2016

- a. Read *The Black Church In the Post-Civil Rights Era* – Chapters 2, 4 -7
- b. Focus your critical inquiry based on the following questions:

Pinn provides much information about the theological and practical ministry themes for ministry in the Black Church in the post-Civil Rights era. Particularly interesting is his uses of pre-Civil Rights and Civil Rights African American religious history as a lens by which to understand how contemporary Black Churches are dealing with issues of economics, health, sexism, homophobia, etc. How does Pinn’s methodology provide a mechanism of theological reflection and praxis whereby African American religious history pre- and post-Civil Rights can assist those who are serving contemporary Black Churches or to people of African descent, as well as to those who serve beyond these areas?

5. Critical Summary 5: *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, Due: Wednesday, January 27, 2016

- a. Read *The Divided Mind of the Black Church* – Introduction, Chapters 3 – 5 and Conclusion
- b. Focus your critical inquiry based on the following questions:

Warnock’s book is mainly about the divide that exists between the academic work of Black and Womanist Theology and of Black Church practitioners (clergy and laity) with regard to the mission of the Black Church Studies, noting that although the term “black theology” is over two decades old, many in the Black Church had never heard of the

terms, concepts, theological reflections regarding Black church history, theology, ethics and practice made by black and womanist theologians in the academy until the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign. In this work, Warnock seeks to provide insight with regard to both the academic and the Black Church's (i.e., clergy and laity) understanding of the mission of the Black Church. Rather than this divide, Warnock suggests a "third way" which combines both the academic (i.e., prophetic) and pastoral vision as a means by which Black Churches might critique the way it carries out its mission in the world.

Provide an overview of Warnock's description of the three positions of the mission of the Black Church (Black theologians, Womanist Theologians, and Black Pastors), as well as his proposed "third way." What are the merits of each position? What are their shortcomings? What of Warnock's "third way" which places the academic in tension with the pastoral/practical ministry and mission of the church? How can this third way inform not only Black churches, but also provide insight to those who are teaching and being trained in the academy (i.e., seminary) to be bridge-builders between the church and the academy via this third way?

2. Class Participation (30% of Grade)

Students are expected to come to class prepared to engage critically the assigned readings and class lecture/field trips. While disagreements may be expected, students are to engage in a practice of intellectual virtue versus intellectual vice, meaning that they are to be respectful of others by listening openly, discerning how another's position informs and/or challenges their own.

3. Final Paper (20% of Grade)

Students will compose a final paper (2,000-3,000 words for Masters Students, 3000 – 5000 for DMin students). This paper will include the following parts:

- a) Articulate a general understanding of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary components of the Black Christian experience in America that includes the rich historical, theological, ethical, and sociological foundations of that experience from an academic perspective as a foundation for ministry and church leadership. (30% or 600 – 900 words)
- b) Articulate how the theological, historical, ethical and sociological foundations of the Black Church experience in America provides a lens by which they conscious of multiple forms of oppression and injustice, including sexism, patriarchy, classism, heterosexism and poverty; and are able to identify strategies by which to meet instances of them in their current and contemporary ministry settings. (30% or 600 – 900 words)
- c) Articulate theologically, strategically, imaginatively how the Black Church experience in America informs their theologies and practices of ministry and church leadership within their own current contexts and in light of recent events. (40% or 800 – 1200 words)

- d) **DMin Students only:** Explain how this course helps to inform your proposed DMin project. Also, explain how Black Church Studies can be informed by your project proposal.

B. Method of Determining Grade:

Your grade will be determined based on the following calculation:

Critical Inquiries (10% each)	50%
Class Participation	30%
Final Paper	20%

Total: 100%

A	100-95
A-	94-90
B+	89-87
B	86-84
B-	83-80
C+	79-77
C	76-70
F	69 and below

VIII. IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS

A. Document Style and Formatting

- 1. All papers are to be submitted as Word documents**
- You are to use **inclusive language** in all writing, including your posts, for this course. Gender-inclusive language is a requirement at United. If you have further questions, please feel free to contact me. Examples of gender-inclusive language include: “humankind” or “humanity” not “mankind”; “person” not “man” or “woman”; “she or he” or “one” not “he.”
- Avoid contractions** in your professional writing (e.g., I’m, can’t, don’t, etc.). Also do not use words such as “obviously” or “clearly,” since if these things were so “obvious” there would be no need for you to write about them!
- Proofread and revise your work!** No one writes a perfect paper the first time and papers that contain many errors are distracting and communicate a lack of effort.
- Papers should reference class materials** (i.e., readings, notes, videos, discussions, etc.) While it is important to make sure that you clearly articulate the author’s arguments that you are using in your papers, do not use lengthy quotations. Rather summarize the author’s main points in your own words and footnote the reference.
- Avoid “church-eze” or “sermonizing” in your papers.** Your papers are not sermons, but academic papers that demonstrate you understand the main issues presented in the reading and in

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discussions and, then, critically engage the argument from your perspective. The purpose of the reflection paper is to add your voice to an ongoing conversation and to increase your learning, they are not to “proof-text” your point.

7. **Papers are to conform to these standards:**

- a) Times New Roman, 12-pt font
- b) 1-inch margins on all sides of the paper
- c) Critical Inquiries will cite the book with a page number in parentheses
- d) The final paper will cite books in footnotes, according to the Chicago Manual of Style.¹
- e) Include your first and last name on the front page of your assignment.

B. Due Dates

Assignments submitted late will **not be accepted** except for cases of family emergencies, demonstrable illness, etc. Contact Dr. LaBoy immediately if you anticipate late submission of an assignment. Thus the grade for unexcused late assignments will be “0.”

C. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the representation of another’s work as your own; it is stealing. This practice extends from the extreme of purchasing a term paper online and submitting it as one’s own, to failing to mark with quotation marks someone else’s words or phrases, to claiming an idea or approach as original when it is the product of another’s research, or even to paraphrasing the work of another without properly citing the source (even if you include that source in your Works Cited page). Take care to note when you are consulting others and give them the credit they are due!

If you plagiarize in this class, you will **automatically earn a 0** on your assignment and be subject to dismissal from this course. **Record of the offense** will be documented in your student file. Additional information on plagiarism can be found in LPTS’s Student Handbook.

IX. STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS:

It is very important for students to submit a course evaluation toward the end of the semester. Instructors do not see the student evaluations at all until after the instructors have submitted the students’ final official grades. Students should feel free to evaluate the course without any negative ramifications.

¹ If you are not sure how to do this, please consult http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

X. FINAL PAPER ASSESSMENT GRADING RUBRIC

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THEME	EXPECTED QUALITIES	ASSESSMENT
<p>Assessment 1:</p> <p>Articulate a general understanding of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary components of the Black Christian experience in America that includes the rich historical, theological, ethical, and sociological foundations of that experience from an academic perspective. (30% or 600 – 900 words)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemplary (25 pts): a comprehensive overview of Black Church Studies, including key aspects of its historical, theological, ethical, worship and socio-political components from an academic perspective. • M.Div Appropriate (20 pts): a limited overview of Black Church Studies, including aspects of its historical, theological, ethical, worship and socio-political components. • Minimally M.Div. Sufficient (17pts): a basic overview of Black Church studies with little to no attention given to its historical, theological, ethical, worship and socio-political aspects. 	
<p>Assessment 2:</p> <p>Articulate how the theological, historical, ethical and sociological foundations of the Black Church experience in America provides a lens by which they conscious of multiple forms of oppression and injustice, including sexism, patriarchy, classism, heterosexism and poverty; and are able to identify strategies by which to meet instances of them in their current and contemporary ministry settings. (30% or 600 – 900 words).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E (25 pts): a significant discussion of how the theological, historical, ethical and sociological foundations of the Black Church experience in America provides a lens by which to understand and address forms of oppression. • M.Div Ap (20 pts) a limited discussion • Min. M.Div Suff (17pts): a focus on either how the theological, historical, ethical and sociological foundations of the Black Church experience in America provides a lens by which to understand forms of oppression <u>or</u> strategies to address oppression without the foundational aspects. 	
<p>Assessment 3:</p> <p>Articulate theologically, strategically, imaginatively how the Black Church experience in America informs their theologies and practices of ministry and church leadership within their own current contexts and in light of recent events. (40% or 800 – 1200 words)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E (25 pts): a significant discussion that encompasses how the Black Church experience in America informs their theologies and practices of ministry and church leadership within their own current contexts and ministry settings. • M.Div Ap (20 pts) a discussion limited evidence. • Min. M.Div Suff (17pts): a discussion of that solely focuses on either the strengths or weaknesses of the Black Church experience in America and how it relates to their current context and ministry setting. 	