

TH 243-3 Introduction to Black Church Studies

LOUISVILLE PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
SPRING 2017

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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:

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:

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

II. RATIONALE:

This course meets one of the requirements for the inclusion of a Black Church Studies course in all of the masters' 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 are able to identify strategies for responding to them.***
- ***SLO8: Students will demonstrate the ability to think theologically, strategically, imaginatively, and contextually about ethical issues.***

III. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

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

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, and imaginatively how the Black Church experience in America informs their theologies and practices of ministry and church leadership within their own contexts.

IV. SEMINARY STANDARDS:

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. 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.

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.

Special Accommodations

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.

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.

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. Three or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

IV. SCHEDULE

February 8: Introduction to Black Church Studies

February 15: Black Church Studies: Overview of Major Themes

Read: Stacey Floyd-Thomas et al, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*

February 22: From Slavery to Jim Crow to Mass Incarceration

Watch: Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and The Justice of God* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mnt8oCOXuNo>)

March 1: The Impact of Women in the Black Church

Read: Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women*

March 8: Womanist Theology and Womanist Ethics

Read: Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women*

Read: Library Reserve Materials

Cone & Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume Two: 1980 – 1992* (Part IV, pp. 257- 308)

March 15: RESEARCH AND STUDY BREAK

March 22: Ontological Blackness and Black Liberation Theology

Read: Library Reserve materials

Pinn, Anthony, “Black is, black ain't’: Victor Anderson, African American theological thought, and identity”

Anderson, Victor, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*, (Introduction, Chap. 3; pp. 11-19, 86-117)

Cone, James. *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of A Black Theology of Liberation, 1968 – 1998* (Introduction, Section 1: Black Theology and Black Power; pp. ix-50)

Watch: Cone, James. *Black Liberation Theology, in its founder's words and Black Liberation Theology: A Closer Look* (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89236116>)

**March 29: The Black Church: Agent of Education, Economic, and Political Uplift
Read: Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era***

**April 5: Black Church Studies in Community-Panel Discussion
Read: Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*
Read: Library Reserve materials**

Lincoln, C. Eric and Lawrence Mamiya, “The Religious Dimension: Toward A Sociology of Black Churches,” *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Chapter 1, pp. 1 – 19)

**April 12: Understanding Colorblind Racism and its Impact
Read: Wise, *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics***

**April 19: Colorblind Racism, Black Lives Matter, and the Black Church
Read: Wise, *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics*
Watch: Romal Tune, “Who’s looking for me?”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5e7yzIrjpbI>**

**April 26: Black Theology and Black Folk Religion
Read: Warnock, *The Divided Mind***

**May 3: Black and Womanist Theology and Folk Religion on the Mission of the Church
Read: Warnock, *The Divided Mind***

VIII. ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION:

A. Assignments

1. Targeted Critical Inquiries (4 at 10 pts per Inquiry for a Total of 40% 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 inquiry. Critical inquiries should:
- 1) Provide a narrative overview of the readings. Strive for balance throughout rather than focusing your inquiry 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 Inquiry 1: *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*, Due: February 15, 2017

- a. 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 Inquiry 2: *If It Weren’t For The Women*, Due: March 8, 2017

- a. 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 Inquiry 3: *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, Due: April 5, 2017

- a. 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?

4. Critical Inquiry 4: *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat From Racial Equity*, Due: April 19, 2017

- a. 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?

2. Small Group Leadership of Book Discussion (20% of Grade)

Students will work in a small group to facilitate discussion around one of the topics in class based on the required readings. Discussion/Presentation should be a minimum of 45 minutes in length and should include a combination of discussion/questions and presentation. All members of the group should be involved in all aspects of the assignment in that each member will be evaluated for their participation in the group individually

3. Class Participation (20% 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.

4. 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)

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.

Assignments and Method of Determining Grade:

Your grade will be determined based on the following calculation:

Critical Inquiries (10% each)	40%
Class Participation	20%
Small Group Leadership	20%
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

VI. IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS

A. Document Style and Formatting

1. All papers are to be submitted as Word documents
2. 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.”
3. **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!
4. **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.
5. **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.
6. **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 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. Williamson or 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.

X. 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

XI. FINAL PAPER ASSESSMENT GRADING RUBRIC

LOUISVILLE PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY Introduction to Black Church Studies

Student learning outcome: 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 are able to identify strategies for responding to them.*
- *SLO8: Students will demonstrate the ability to think theologically, strategically, imaginatively, and contextually about ethical issues.*

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 or 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. 	