

THEO 650: THEOLOGIES OF BLACK LIFE

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Course Description

This course will examine theologies that emerge from black diasporic existence in America. Examining both theologies within a frame of historical development as well as examples of current questions and answers regarding theological explications of black life, we will ask how black life is imagined and re-imagined in response to the denials of its humanity, and how understandings of God shape and are shaped by realities of suffering, survival, and hope, whether in wide movements or everyday modes.

Learning Objectives

- Identify significant themes in theological articulations of black life in America.
- Examine development and relationships between historical development of black theology and contemporary theological, religious, or spiritual explications of black life.

Course Readings

Required

- Alice Walker. *The Color Purple*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. [isbn: 978-0151191543, \$0.00-\$7.89]
*any edition is acceptable
- Toni Morrison. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Vintage, 1992. [isbn: 978-1400033423, Amazon, \$13.49]
- Katie G Cannon, and Anthony B Pinn. *Oxford Handbook of African American Theology*. Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2014. [isbn: 978-0190917845, Amazon, \$47.72, free online library access]
*readings from this text will be assigned throughout the semester. There will be an updated syllabus a week before classes begin to reflect these additions.

**Remaining readings will be provided as pdfs on Moodle. Each week's reading will be a selection of 2 chapters from the assigned readings. For those books that are of particular interest I would highly recommend purchasing the entire text.*

Assignments

Weekly Connections (30%)

Each week students will respond to a posted question engaging a particular passage in response to a broad theme of black life and theology presented in the text for the week. Responses should highlight connections with other passages and work to exegete or analyze what is at stake for the author in that particular passage. Responses should be 300-500 words master's students, and 500-750 words for doctoral students). Citations should be parenthetical. (P/ F)

Midterm Check-in/synthesis (30%)

For Master's students

At the midpoint of the semester students will complete an online, open book responsive writing exercise where you will be asked to respond to a series of questions about the previous week's readings. These questions are NOT exam questions eliciting specific answers. These questions will be drawn from the weekly connection prompts and will be an opportunity for you to make connections, observations, identify themes, similarities or contrasts, as well as pose questions that have emerged for you during the first half of the class. Responses will be graded based on their engagement with the texts and how well they display understanding of the key figures discussed. More information about the midterm check-in will be provided in the beginning of class.

For Doctoral Students

Sample Comprehensive Exam Questions (30%) – Develop a list of five comprehensive exam questions and brief annotations regarding the framework and thought process behind the question.

Final Paper (40%)

Students will offer a final paper (1000-1500 words for masters students, 2000-3000 words for doctoral students). This paper can provide a close reading of a passage, provide a comparative analysis of two authors, or be an article tailored towards public outlets such as NPR, Christian Century, or The Atlantic, for example. I am open to additional forms of engagement as well.

Schedule

****the following schedule is from the Fall 2021 iteration of this class. An updated schedule will be provided just prior to the first day of class. In addition to updated dates there may also be some changes to the readings. Required texts will remain the same. These do reflect the range of readings we will engage in the semester****

We will begin with a brief welcome and introduction to the course, assignments, structure, etc. Come to class on the 7th having read James Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues" and Chapter 3 of the Oxford Handbook of African American Theology, "African American Religious Experience" by Shawn Copeland.

We will meet most weeks online using Microsoft Teams. Once a month there will be an opportunity for in-person class meetings. Those dates are to be determined and online options will be available for all classes.

Part I. Introduction and Womanist Readings of Black Life

Week 1 (September 7) Introduction

James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"

Introduction and Ch. 3, Oxford Handbook of African American Theology

Week 2 (September 14)

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

Week 3 (September 22)

Katie Canon, *Black Womanist Ethics*

Week 4 (September 28)

Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience*

Week 5 (October 5)

Delores Williams, *Sisters In the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*

Part II. The Liberation

Week 6 (October 12)

James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*

Week 7 (October 19)

Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*

Part III. Black Religion and Black Theology

Week 8 (October 25) Charles Long, *Significations*

Week 9 (November 1)

Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*

Week 10 (November 8)

Tamura Lomax, *Jezebel Unhinged*

Part IV. Improvisations on a Theme

Week 11 (November 15)

Ashon Crawley, *Black Pentecostal Breath*

Week 12 (November 22) (no class, break)

There are no assignments for this week. Rest, walk, catch up on work, get ahead on work, breathe, enjoy.

Week 13 (November 29)

Willie James Jennings, *Christian Imagination*

Week 14 (December 6)

Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*