Seminar on the Black Church: History, Theology, Prophetic Voice
DM731
Blended Synchronous- in person, and/or synchronous online
August 17-21, 2026
9:00 AM-4:00 PM

Professor
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Course Description

The course will examine historical and theological foundations of the Black Church in the United States, with particular emphasis on the institution's prophetic voice. Course readings, lectures, videos and presenters will focus on pre-Revolutionary War, Revolutionary War to the Civil War, Reconstruction to WWII, WWII to 1968, and 1968 to 2021. Specific attention to the political and social ethos of the United States during these eras, will help illuminate how Black Churches shared, taught and preached an understanding of God at work in the lives of Black people. Students will gain an understanding of the movement, growth, development, challenges, setbacks and victories of the Black Church and how it became a primary prophetic voice for the country and world.

Learning Goals

Knowing

* Acquired knowledge and critical information about the history of the Black Church will deepen students awareness of Christianity in contemporary America.

* Students will learn how the Black Church has been instrumental in shaping the theological views of a majority of Black communities and how these views translated into direct action.

* Students will learn of important historical personalities in Black Church history with special attention to women and men whose prophetic voices advocated for justice and equality.

Being

* Practical development will help students in their local work, as they engage in networking and collaboration with diverse churches in their own communities.

* Theological growth will occur as students learn how people in time and space have understood and related to God.
* Spiritual maturation will take place among students as they respond to the voices from the readings, videos and presenters.

Doing

* Students' increased knowledge of the Black Church will provide impetus and inspiration for engaging in the current work of the church- local, national and global.

* Students will engage in tangible and “doable” activities within their churches, as they learn how the Black Church’s work focused on active leaders and followers.

* Students will work to shape their own prophetic voices as they learn from the myriad of prophetic voices that have been predominate in the history of the Black Church.

Course Texts

James H. Evans, Jr., We Have Been Believers, (Fortress Press, 20212), ISBN 978-0-8006-9878-2

Cornel West and Eddie Glaude, Jr., African American Religious Thought, (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003) ISBN 0-664-22459-8

C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, The Black Church in the African American Experience, (Duke University Press, 1999) ISBN 0-8223-1057-0

Kate Masur, Until Justice Be Done, (W.W. Norton and Company, 2021) ISBN 9781324005940

Katie Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, Angela D. Sims, eds., Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader (Westminister John Knox, 2011) ISBN 0664235376

Pre-Course Work

1) Write a two-page summary on what you know about Black Church History and Theology.

2) Write a two-page summary on a selected Black prophetic voice out of the Black Church tradition between 1786 and 1861.

3) Write a summary on your current church demographics and the neighborhood and community it serves.

All summary papers are due July 31 by 5:00 P.M.

Post-Course Work

Final Paper: 8-10 pages. The theme of the paper will be focused on your local church setting, or a church you once attended. The paper will include analysis of the church's history and theology. Based upon assigned readings and class lectures, does your church possess a prophetic voice for this day and age? If so, why? If not, why not? Is your church involved in any social justice or civil rights issues of the day?

Course Organization and Schedule

Monday, August 17
Session 1 Introductions, Review of the Syllabus, Expectations and Goals for the course. Power Point presentation of The Cross and the Lynching Tree, by James H. Cone, with specific emphasis on the *theology of suffering i*n the Black Church.

Video from Henry Louis Gates' *This Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song*

Tuesday, August 18
Session 2 Discussion of reading assignments and lecture
Reading Assignments

From African American Religious Thought:
Origins of the Church, Mays and Nicholson
The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death, Thurman
The Black Church: A Gender Perspective, Higginbotham

From The Black Church in the African American Experience, Lincoln and Mamiya
1. *The Religious Dimension: Toward a Sociology of Black Churches*
2. *The Black Baptists: First Black Churches in America*
3. *The Black Methodists: The Institutionalization of Black Religious Independence*

Noon
From We Have Been Believers, Evans
1. *Revelation and Liberation*
2. *The Bible: A Text for Outsiders*

From Until Justice Is Done, Masur
1. *On the Grounds of Expediency and Good Policy*
2. *A Free Man of Colour, and a Citizen of this State*

Wednesday, August 19
Session 3 Discussion of reading assignments and lecture
Reading Assignments

From Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader, Cannon, Townes and Sims

1. *Growing in the Garden*
   A. Racism and Economics: The Perspective of Oliver C. Cox
   B. What do 19th Century Reformers Have to Say to 20th Century Liberationists?
   C. Ethic as an Art of Doing the Work Our Souls Must Have
   D. Re-reading for Liberation: African American Women and the Bible
   E. How Women Relate to the Evils of Nature

From Until Justice Is Done, Masur

1. *The Sacred Doctrine of Equal Rights*
2. *Self-Preservation is the First Law of Nature*

From African American Religious Thought

1. *Doers of the Word: Theorizing African American Women Speakers and Writers in the Antebellum North*
2. *Together and in Harness: Women's Traditions in the Sanctified Church*

Thursday, August 20

Session Four Discussion of reading assignments and lecture

From We Have Been Believers, Evans

1. *The Ungiven God*
2. *Jesus Christ: Liberator and Mediator*
3. *On Being Black*

From The Black Church in the African American Experience, Lincoln and Mamiya

1. *The New Black Revolution: The Black Consciousness Movement and the Black Church*
2. *The Pulpit and the Pew: the Black Church and Women*
3. *The Black Church and the Twenty-First Century: Challenges to the Black Church*

Friday, August 21

Session Five Discussion of reading assignments and lecture

From African American Religious Thought, West and Glaude

Black Theology and the Black Woman

From We Have Been Believers, Evans

The Last Shall be First

From Until Justice be Done, Masur

Injustice and Oppression Incarnate

Michael Nabors is a Benjamin E. Mays Fellow and Samuel DeWitt Proctor Fellow, earning his D.Min. at United Theological Seminary in Homiletics. He attended Princeton Theological Seminary where he earned M.Div. and Th.M degrees. He also earned a B.S. from Western Michigan University in English and Creative Writing. He is Senior Pastor of Second Baptist Church, Evanston, IL where he has served five years. Prior to this assignment he served churches in Detroit, Michigan, Trenton, New Jersey and Princeton, New Jersey. He is president of the Evanston/North Shore NAACP and was previous president of NAACP chapters in Trenton and Princeton. He has taught at Calvin Theological Seminary, Ashland Theological Seminary and Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit where he was also Director of the Master of Divinity Program and Assessment Officer for the school.

Bibliography

The Black Church in America, Michael J. Battle, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006)
Albert Cleage, The Black Messiah, (Africa World Press, 1969)
Albert Cleage, Black Christian Nationalism, (Luxor Publishers of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, 1972))
James H. Cone, A Theology of Liberation, (Orbis Books, 2019 Anniversary edition)
James H. Cone, For My People: Black Theology and The Black Church
James H. Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, (Orbis Books, 1969)
James H. Cone, The Spirituals and the Blues, (Orbis Books, 2019 Anniversary edition)
James H. Cone, The Cross and the Lynching Tree, (Orbis Books, 2013)
K. Shawn Copeland, Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience, (Orbis Books, 2018)
Keri Day, Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism: Womanist and Black Feminist Perspective, (Palgrave Macmillian, 2016)
W.E.B. DuBois, The Negro Church, (Cascade Books, 2011)
James H. Evans Jr., We Shall All Be Changed: Social Problems and Theological Renewal, (Fortress Press, 1997)
Cain Hope Felder, Troubling Biblical Waters, (Orbis Books, 1989)
Juan Marcial Floyd-Thomas, Liberating Black Church History: Making it Plain, (Abingdon Press, 2014)
Stacy Floyd Thomas, Black Church Studies: An Introduction, (Abingdon Press, 2007)
Henry Louis Gates, The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song, (Penguin Press, 2021)
James Harris, Pastoral Theology, (Fortress Press, 1991)
Dwight N. Hopkins & Linda E. Thomas eds., Walk Together Children: Black and Womanist Theologies, Church, and Theological Education, (Cascade Books, 2010)
Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio eds., The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology, (Cambridge University Press, 2012)
Eboni Marshall Turman, Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, The Black Church and the Council of Chalcedon, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)
John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, (Pearson Education, 1969)
Peter J. Paris, The Social Teachings of the Black Church, (Fortress Press, 1985)

Anthony and Anne Pinn, The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era, (Orbis Books, 2002)
Albert Raboteau, Slave Religion, (Oxford University Press, 1978)
Albert J. Raboteau, Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans, (Oxford University Press, 2001)
Isaiah Robertson, Black Church Empowered, (Independently Published, 2020)
Milton C. Serntett, ed., African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness, (Duke University Press, 1985)
Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism Between the Wars, (University of Alabama Press, 2017)
Howard Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited, (Abingdon Press, 1949)
Raphael Warnock, The Divided Mind of the Black Church, (NYU Press, 2014)
James Melvin Washington, Frustrated Fellowship, (Mercer, 1986)
Cornel West, Prophetic Fragments, (Africa World Press, 1993)
Delores H. Williams, Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk, (Orbis Books, 1993)
Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People, (Orbis Books, 1992)
Carter G. Woodson, The History of the Negro Church, (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2017, originally published 1921)