

**DM727 Hermeneutics of Race, Gender, Class, Age and Ability
(Designed for the Strategic Black Church Leadership Cohort)**

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

Doctor of Ministry Program

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Contrary to popular belief, there is no such thing as “objective” interpretation. In fact, it can be argued that all interpretation, especially biblical and theological interpretation and practice is a matter of and affected by the social location of the interpreter and those who are receiving the interpretation.¹ Furthermore, Mitzi J. Smith maintains that even the selection of the piece to be interpreted is an act of interpretation because of the value the interpreter places on the object of interpretation. This idea that everything is an interpretation, especially as they pertain to biblical, theological and artistic forms of interpretation is called hermeneutics.

In this course, we will be analyzing how race, gender, sexual orientation, class, age and ageism affect how one interprets whether as interpreter or receiver of the interpretation. We will also discuss how important lived and living experience, as well as memory, affect interpretation (i.e., the “fluidity” of interpretation.)

This course is not a philosophical debate about the ontology of race/racism, gender/sexism/ homophobia, and class/inequality (i.e., it does not question whether these realities exist). This class begins with the assumption that these are realities which have an observable history and which have been an intimate part of the systemic whole of modernity’s distorted distribution of power, wealth and influence in the world – socially and politically. In this class we will approach the issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, oppression, power, and privilege from a theological and social-scientific perspective.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Acquaint themselves with biblical, theological, and philosophical approaches to hermeneutics.
- Analyze the ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality have been, and continue to be, socially constructed.
- Apply the feminist theoretical lens of intersectionality to understand how race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and age integrate, overlap, and intersect to affect individuals’ lived experiences with structures of power and how these affect one’s biblical and theological interpretation and practice.
- Understand the difference between Paolo Fieri’s “banking” and “conscientization” models of education and how these affect the interpretation and the receiving of the interpretation with regard to social movements.

¹ Mitzi J. Smith, 14-20.

COURSE OUTCOMES

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- Hone the skill of deploying a theological hermeneutic as appropriate to their fields of scholarship and inquiry.
- Deploy a personal working definition of hermeneutics.
- Employ a hermeneutical spiral that incorporates a hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval.
- Connect wider hermeneutical concerns to their field and research interests.
- Use a contextualized theological hermeneutic to make sense of cultural artifacts and other non-traditional “texts” so as to understand how these resources may inform or relate to “traditional” forms of biblical and theological interpretation and practice.

COURSE TEXTS

Books:

Andrews, Dale P. *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002 (ISBN-13: 978-0664224295. 160 pp.). Price: \$20.48 (Paperback); \$9.99 (Kindle).

Cone, James H. *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2019 (ISBN-13: 978-1626983779. 204 pp.). Price: \$22.49 (Paperback) \$13.50 (Kindle).

Douglas, Kelly Brown. *What's Faith Got to Do with It: Black Bodies/Christian Souls*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005 (ISBN-13: 978-1570756092. 272 pp.). Price: \$20.90 (Paperback) \$13.50 (Kindle).

Lightsey, Pamela R. *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology*. Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015 (ISBN-13: 978-1498206648 (128 pp.). Price: \$18.00 (Paperback) \$9.99 (Kindle).

Powe., F. Douglas. *New Wine, New Wineskins: How African American Congregations Can Reach New Generations*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012, (ISBN-13: 978-1426742224. 136 pp.). Price: \$18.71 (Paperback); \$13.79 (Kindle).

Rah, Soong Chan. *Prophetic Lament: A Call For Justice in Troubled Times*. Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2015 (ISBN-13: 978-0830836949. 224 pp.). Price: \$13.99 (Paperback); \$13.29 (Kindle).

Articles:

Cristena Cleveland, Urban Church Plantations, <https://prismmagazine.org/urban-church-plantations/>. (Posted on Moodle).

Jacquelyn Grant, “The Sin of Servanthood” in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Sin and Evil*. (Posted on Moodle).

Felicia LaBoy, *You Want Me To Talk To Who? Explorations in Faith and Fear from the Underside of the Bible* (extended article) originally published in *Review and Expositor*. (Posted on Moodle).

Joerg Rieger. "Theology and Mission Between Neocolonialism and Postcolonialism," *Mission Studies*, 21 no 2 2004, 201-227. (Posted on Moodle)

Miguel de la Torre, "A Colonized Christmas Story," *Interpretation*, 71 no 4 2017, 408-417. (Posted on Moodle.)

Bible (One of the Following):

The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, notes and references by H. C. Kee. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Price: \$9.99 (Hardcover).

The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, NRSV, edited by B. M. Metzger and R. E. Murphy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991 (or newer edition). Price: \$20.85 (Hardcover); \$10.99 (Kindle).

The Harper-Collins Study Bible. Fully Revised and Updated: NRSV. General editor, revised edition, Harold W. Attridge. HarperSanFrancisco, 2006. Price: \$27.32 (Paperback); \$25.32 (Hardcover); \$17.99 (eTextbook).

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1) Students will provide five (5) critical book reviews (3 – 5 pages//1500 – 2500 words) on the following texts **based on the instructions in the syllabus**:

- Andrews, Dale. *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion*;
 - Rah, Soong Chan. *Prophetic Lament: A Call For Justice in Troubled Times*;
 - Douglas, Kelly Brown. *What's Faith Got to Do with It: Black Bodies/Christian Souls*;
 - Lightsey, Pamela R. *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology*; and
 - Powe., F. Douglas. *New Wine, New Wineskins: How African American Congregations Can Reach New Generations*.
- **Instructions for Critical Summaries**

Critical summaries should:

- a) Provide a narrative overview of the whole of the book. 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.
- b) Do not use lengthy quotations from the book. Rather summarize them in your own words and footnote the reference. The purpose of the summaries and papers are to add your voice to an ongoing conversation and to increase your learning, they are not to "proof-text" your point.
- c) 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.
- d) In the last ½ to 1 page, you may raise questions and make critical observations about the book.
- e) Remember: Avoid "church-eze" or "sermonizing" in your summaries. 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.

- 2) **Students are required to be in attendance for the entire intensive week of the class.** If this causes an issue, arrangements approved by the professor should be made beforehand. If students do not attend the entire intensive of the class, they will have to repeat it. **Exceptions will be made for emergencies only.**
- 3) **Students will keep a journal during the synchronous portion of the course.** Two journal entries are required daily. The morning entry is to be completed as we gather for class and should speak to the expectations students have for the day. The evening entry is to be completed at the end of the day and after students read the corresponding chapter in Said I Wasn't Going To Tell Nobody. **The morning's entry is limited to no more than 1 paragraph. The evening's entry should be at least 1 page. The evening's entry should be a "free flow" in response to the following prompts:**
- a) **Inspire (!):** What stands out positively from today's learnings and discussions? Why? What potential did today have to change how you might analyze the biblical and theological foundations that undergird your project? How might today's learnings and discussions influence how you execute your final project?
 - b) **Inquire (!):** What questions have been raised for you today? Why? What potential did today have to change how you might analyze the biblical and theological foundations that undergird your project? How might today's learnings and discussions influence how you execute your final project?
 - c) **Irk (#&*!):** What has "rubbed you the wrong way" or created dissonance for you from today's learnings and discussions? Why? What potential did today have to change how you might analyze the biblical and theological foundations that undergird your project? How might today's learnings and discussions influence how you execute your final project?
 - d) **Require (Δ):** What changes seem to be required of you from today's learnings and discussions? Why? What potential did today have to change how you might analyze the biblical and theological foundations that undergird your project? How might today's learnings and discussions influence how you execute your final project?
- 4) A final paper (10 – 12 pages/5000 – 6000 words) in response to the following prompts:
- a) Discuss what hermeneutical lenses you had previously considered using for the analysis of your biblical and theological foundations and design of your final project, especially as they pertain to you and/or the partners (i.e., subjects) of your inquiry.
 - b) After this course, what hermeneutical lenses are you considering using for the analysis of your biblical and theological foundations and design of your final project, especially as they pertain to you and/or the partners (i.e., subjects) of your inquiry. How/Why have these changed (or not)? What do you "see" or consider now in developing your final project that you hadn't before?

RECOMMENDED COURSE SCHEDULE

COURSE GRADING:

Critical Book Reviews (5 @ 10% each):	50%
Journal and Class Participation:	30%
Final Paper:	20%

Grading Criteria for Written Assignments

1. Each answer offers a clear thesis statement, follows a logical organization, is well developed, and is free of grammatical and spelling errors.
2. You enter into intelligent, critical conversation with the course texts.
3. You demonstrate a depth of theological and pastoral insight in your critical analysis and constructive claims.

Grading Scale

A (95 – 100)	C (72-76)
A- (91- 94)	C- (70-72)
B+ (87-90)	D+ (67- 69)
B (82 – 86)	D (60 – 66)
B- (80-82)	F (anything below 59)
C+ (77 – 79)	

Please note this course will be assigned a letter grade

COURSE SCHEDULE

Prework:

Critical Summaries for the following (Due First Day of Class – January 24, 2022):

- Andrews, Dale. *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion*;
- Rah, Soong Chan. *Prophetic Lament: A Call For Justice in Troubled Times*; and
- Douglas, Kelly Brown. *What's Faith Got to Do with It: Black Bodies/Christian Soul*

Read *A Colonized Christmas Story* by Miguel De La Torre prior to the start of class.

Intensive Class Schedule:

Each day of the intensive week will follow roughly the following format:

8:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.	Prayer/Devotion (Journal writing/sharing), Course Lecture, Part I
9:45 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Break
10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	Course Lecture, Instructions for Film Time
11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Extended Break (Lunch and View Movie/Documentary)
2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Film Discussion in light of Hermeneutics Topic for the Day
3:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.	Break
3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Group/Class Hermeneutical discussion of Biblical or Theological Concept

Journal entries are to be completed everyday (AM/PM as per the instructions above.)

Here are the topics and movies/documentaries for each day:

January 18 (Race)	Movie/Documentary: <i>I Am Not Your Negro</i> or <i>The Butler</i>
January 19 (Class)	Movie/Documentary: <i>Pruitt-Igo Myth</i>
January 20 (Gender)	Movie/Documentary: <i>The Secret Life of Bees</i> or <i>The Women of Brewster Place</i>
January 21 (Sexual Orientation)	Movie/Documentary: <i>Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin</i>
January 24 (Age)	Movie/Documentary: <i>America To Me: There's Nothing Funny About Race</i>

Post-work (All Post-Work Is Due by February 18, 2022:

Critical Summaries for the following:

- Lightsey, Pamela R. *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology*.
- Powe., F. Douglas. *New Wine, New Wineskins: How African American Congregations Can Reach New Generations*.

Final Paper as per the instructions above.

ACADEMIC POLICIES AND RUBRICS

These come from my colleague Dr. Mark Teasdale and will be used for this class as well.

Academic Policies

All students are required to abide by the academic policies detailed in the Academic Handbook for the current academic year. The following policies are of particular importance to the successful completion of one's coursework:

Writing

- **Academic integrity and plagiarism:** (See 19-20 Handbook, 12, 78-83) All professors are required to respond to all suspected incidents of academic dishonesty, especially plagiarism. Repeated incidents of plagiarism or academic dishonesty may result in dismissal from the school.
- **Writing and citations:** The Turabian Manual for Writers and the Chicago Manual of Style footnote/bibliography format provide the standard formats for all introductory courses. Basic information on these formats is available online here. In advanced courses an instructor may require another style guide appropriate to the discipline (such as APA). (19-20 Handbook, 84)
- **Writing Support:** The Writing Center at Garrett-Evangelical offers programs to support all students' theological research and writing. See <https://www.garrett.edu/student-life/student-services> "Writing Center" for more detailed information.

Attendance and Class Participation

- **Inclusivity/Diversity:** The basic commitments of the seminary to mutual love and searching for the truth in Christ lead to a principle that in the classroom and in course assignments, persons are always to be respected and ideas are to be freely discussed. All participants in the teaching-learning process have an obligation to honor and respect varying perspectives on relevant issues. (See 19-20 Handbook, 9)
- **Attendance and lateness policies:** Attendance is required. Students who miss more than 20% of the class sessions (e.g., more than 2 classes in the weekly schedule, a proportionate amount for other class formats) should not expect to pass the class. (19-20 Handbook, 19)
- Some faculty may limit on the usage of electronic devices such as cell phones during class. At the least, all cell phones should be silenced during the whole of a class session.

Academic Accommodations

- Student accommodations for documented conditions should be developed and requested before the beginning of the semester. See the Accessibility, Special Needs, and Disabilities policy and process set out in the Academic Handbook (19-20 Handbook, 12). Such accommodations are developed in consultation with the Registrar.
- **Extensions:** For Masters students, extensions, if granted, are normally for four weeks following the last day of class in spring and fall semesters or the final due date for coursework for January and summer terms. Extensions may not exceed three months following the end of the term. (19-20 Handbook, 20)

Course Policies

1. **Excellence in Writing:** Even though this is an UM Studies course, everything you have learned about good writing style still counts! Obtuse or inelegant writing in your essays will be reason for a reduced grade. If you need help with your writing, please contact the instructor.
2. **Intellectual Virtue:** We are striving not only to learn about a subject, but to sharpen our abilities to think critically. To do this, we must practice intellectual virtue by being open-minded, straightforward and thoughtful in our spoken and written work. We show our Christian scholarship not only by considering issues and questions that are central to our faith, but by being careful and respectful in our treatment of the authors of our texts, the ideas we discuss, and the thoughts of our fellow classmates.
3. **Late Work:** Late work is not accepted in this course without prior approval of the professor.

Technology Notes

Given the lack of personal contact during the course, you will need to be certain you have sufficient technological ability to access and participate in this course. **It is the student's responsibility to have sufficient technology to access and participate in the course.** The instructor will assume this and is not obligated to take technological difficulties into account when assessing the student's work.

Minimum technological requirements:

- Web Browser – You will need the latest version of the web browser you are using (Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, Google Chrome, etc.). Note that not all browsers work equally well

with Moodle, so you may need to experiment with them if you have difficulty using all the functions on the site. (I use Firefox and have never had issues.)

- Operating System – In order to use the latest browser, you will need to have an operating system (Windows, Mac OS, etc.) that is up-to-date enough to handle it. Please be certain you have such an operating system.
- Internet Connection – You will need a high-speed internet connection that is sufficient to run streaming video with no difficulty. Usually cable and dsl connections can do this. Dial up cannot. If your home internet connection is not sufficient to provide this kind of connection, you will need to find access to a computer that does have this connection.
- Hardware – You will need sufficient computing power in terms of memory, speed, audio, and video for the different aspects of this course to work well. Make certain you can run the necessary software and fully participate online.

Rubrics

Below is a rubric that offers insight into how all assignments will be graded. Please notice that turning in work late or without following the directions provided in the syllabus can lead to a failing grade. Please notice, also, that it takes creative work to receive an “A.” Work that shows a good grasp of material, but that is not creative in a way that looks to construct new pathways of learning and ministry, is worth a “B.”

	Excellent – 100%	Above Average – 85%	Average – 70%	Failing – 0%
Timeliness	The student turned in the assignment by the due date.	N/A	N/A	The assignment was late. (This causes a failing grade for the entire assignment.)
Followed Directions	The student followed all the directions provided by the instructor in the syllabus or online for the assignment (including word counts, content, format, etc.).	The student followed the directions in a way that addressed the core learning objectives, but did not follow the logistical directions (e.g., word counts, outline of assignment).	The student followed the logistical directions but did not address the core learning objectives.	The student failed to follow the logistical and learning objective directions provided by the instructor in the syllabus or online.

Coherence	There is a logical flow throughout the assignment such that it is easily understandable and persuasive in the points it makes.	There is a logical flow throughout the assignment such that it is easily understandable. It may not be persuasive in its presentation, however.	There is an overall logic apparent in the assignment, though it requires some effort to grasp what the logic is.	There is no apparent logic to the assignment. It is obtuse and difficult to understand the points it makes.
Content	The student clearly interacts with the course materials (readings and lectures), demonstrating both comprehension of the material and offering creative and constructive insight for further conversation on the topic at hand.	The student clearly interacts with all the course materials (readings and lectures) appropriate to the topic, demonstrating comprehension of the material.	The student clearly interacts with only some of the materials appertaining to the topic of the assignment, demonstrating comprehension of the material. Alternately, the student uses the appropriate materials, but does not represent them accurately.	The student's assignment either does not refer to anycourse material or clearly misunderstands the material it does use.
Collegiality	The assignment is academic in tone (or is appropriate to the intended audience), inviting further constructive conversation on the topic, even in the case of disagreeing with authors, the instructor, or other students.	The assignment is academic in tone (or is appropriate to the intended audience), though can emphasize deconstructive interaction more than constructive.	The assignment is more conversational than academic in tone (or is not entirely appropriate to the intended audience) and/or is defensive about engaging in constructive self-reflection.	The assignment is entirely informal (or is inappropriate to the intended audience) and/or may be entirely negative by attacking others and resisting reflection on one's own work invited by course material or peer feedback.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SUGGESTED MATERIALS

Books

- Anderson, Cheryl B. *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies: The Need for Inclusive Biblical Interpretation 1st Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Bailey, Randall C. “Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism,” *Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies*, 2009.
- Barnes, Chanequa W. *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength*. Eugene: Cascade, 2014.
- Best, Wallace D.. *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Blount, Brian K (ed.). *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007.
- Caputo, John D. *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information*. London: Pelican Books, 2018.
- Claytor, Cassi P. *Black Privilege: Modern Middle-Class Blacks With Credentials and Cash To Spend*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020.
- Coleman, Monica A. *Ain't I A Womanist Too? Third-Wave Womanist Religious Thought*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.
- Cone, James H. *The Cross and The Lynching Tree*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013.
- DeYoung, Curtiss Paul (ed). *The People's Bible. New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009.
- Foley, Edward. *Theological Reflection Across Religious Traditions: The Turn to Reflective Believing*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2015.
- Felder, Cain H. (ed). *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation. Thirtieth Anniversary Expanded Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021.
- Gafney, Wilda C. *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017.
- Griffin, Horace L. *Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians And Gays in Black Churches*, Pilgrim Press, 2006.
- Hornsby, Teresa J. and Ken Stone. *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*. *Society of Biblical Literature*, 2011.
- Hopkins, Dwight D. *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004.
- Jones, Robert P. *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021.
- McMickle, Marvin. *Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge, Words of Hope*. Cleveland: Judson Press, 2021.
- Mitchem, Stephanie. *Introducing Womanist Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002.

Nolasco, Jr., Rolf R. *God's Beloved Queer: Identity, Spirituality, and Practice*, New York: Wipf and Stock, 2019.

Pinn, Anthony B. and Dwight Hopkins. *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Rah, Soong Chan. *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery*. Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2019.

Smith, Mitzi J. *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*. Eugene: Cascade, 2015 (ISBN-13: 978-1625647450 (324 pp.). Price: \$38.00 (Paperback) \$9.99 (Kindle).

Sugirtharajah, R.S. *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the World: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World, 25th Anniversary Edition*. Orbis, 2016.

Sugirtharajah, R.S. *The Postcolonial Bible*. Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.

Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.

Warnock, Raphael G. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness*, New York: NYU Press, 2020.

Westwood, Susan (ed.). *Ageing, Diversity and Equality: Social Justice Perspectives*, New York: Routledge, 2020.

Young, Amos. *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

Articles

Ellen Armour, "Queer Bibles, Queer Scriptures? An Introductory Response" in *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*.

Randall C. Bailey, "The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text" in *The Postcolonial Bible*.

Felicia LaBoy, "Urban Ministry: The New Frontier?" in *Urban Ministry Reconsidered: Contexts and Approaches*.