

THEO 850: THEOLOGIES OF BLACK LIFE

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Class times: Friday, 1pm-8pm; Saturday, 9pm-3pm

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:

Full Texts

- Alice Walker. *The Color Purple*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. [isbn: 978-0151191543, \$0.00-\$7.89] **any edition is acceptable*
- Emilie Townes. *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan [isbn: 978-1403972736, \$39.63]
- Toni Morrison. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Vintage, 1992. [isbn: 978-1400033423, \$13.49]
- James Cone. *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992. [isbn: 978-0883448434, \$11.08]
- Shawn Copeland. *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2018. [isbn: 978-1626982987, \$15.71]
- Ashon Crawley. *Blackpentecostal Breath: an aesthetics of possibility*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016. [isbn: 978-0-8232-7455, \$25.00]
- Willie James Jennings. *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. [isbn: 978-0300171365, \$21.96]

Essays/Chapters (to be provided on Moodle)

W.E.B. DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk*

James Baldwin. "Sonny's Blues"

_____. "The Creative Process"

Pauli Murray
Martin Luther King, Jr.
Victor Anderson. "Beyond Ontological Blackness"
Delores Williams. *Sisters In the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*.
William R. Jones. *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology*
Charles Long. *Significations*
J. Kameron Carter. *Race: A Theological Account*.

Assignments:

Presentation – Presentations will provide historical and theological framing of the given text, identifying the dialogical context and key responses the given text offers as well as identifying its theological proposal. Presentations will provide a brief bibliography that highlights the context of the given text. Students will turn in a written presentation each weekend. Presentations should be 5-6 double-spaced pages offering a critical analysis/connection/interpretation of a particular reading assigned for the given week.

Context Paper – Using one of the texts you presented on, write a 5-7 page, double-spaced, contextual analysis of a given text. By contextual analysis, you will describe how the given text is drawing from or diverging from previous theological claims and how those patterns shape the claims in the text you are analyzing. Analysis should be turned in along with the chosen text in the week it was assigned.

Sample Syllabus (*for doctoral students) - Students will create a syllabus for an undergraduate course on Black Christian Thought/Life or Religious Studies (class can be adapted to student's discipline)

February 28/29

Gleaning themes, tensions,

- Baldwin (Sonny's Blues)*
- W.E.B. DuBois*
- Harriet Jacobs*
- David Walker*
- Martin Luther King, Jr.*
- Pauli Murray*

March 27/28

- Alice Walker

- James Cone
- Delores Williams
- Charles Long*
- Emilie Townes
- Victor Anderson*

May 1/2

- Toni Morrison
- Willie James Jennings
- Shawn Copeland
- Ashon Crawley