

# THEO 650: Theology, Race, Culture

## Spring 2022

Instructor: Dr. Brian Bantum  
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Meeting times: Mondays, 6:30-8:30pm  
Office hours: by appointment

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### Course Description

Since its inception the church has struggled to articulate what it means to be a follower of Christ within its broader cultural, political, and social context. This tension became a unique and powerful reality in the modern world as cultural, social, and political realities radically expanded from regional to global realities. The expansion of European colonial powers to “the world” grew out of and instantiated new and powerful ways of imagining one’s place in the world with consequences for all peoples. Sadly, part of the legacy of this modern racial reality was the presence of the church in the midst of and as a catalyst for the re-imagining how lives are ordered and bound to one another. This course will examine the relationship between the theology and ministry of the church and the complicated realities of race and culture in the modern world.

Drawing upon a variety of explicit and implicit theological sources we will attend to the creation of race and ethnicity as a theological moment in the modern world and how this reality has been negotiated. In the midst of this, we will reflect upon the challenges and possibilities of discipleship and ministry in a world so profoundly shaped by realities of race.

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### Learning Objectives

- Identify the distinction between race as a “natural” or as a socially constructed description of personhood
- Examine several significant theological rebuttals to dehumanizing theologies of race and identity
- Dialogue with literary and theological descriptions of race and ethnicity in the United States
- Workshop approaches to pastoral care in scenarios where race is particularly evident
- Reflect on how race has shaped or misshapen you. What does ministry or Christian leadership look like when it actively works for freedom and fullness of personhood of all people?

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## Course Readings

- Charles Chesnutt. *The House Behind the Cedars*. New York: Modern Library, 2003. (Available for free online, any edition is acceptable)
- Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, Being*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010. [isbn: 9781506463254; \$23.92 at [bookshop.org](http://bookshop.org)]
- Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Maryknoll, Orbis, 2015. [isbn: 9781626981096; \$23.92 at [bookshop.org](http://bookshop.org)]
- Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011. [isbn: 9780300171365; \$25.30 at [bookshop.org](http://bookshop.org)]
- Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*. New York: Mariner Books, 2019. [isbn: 9780358062684; \$15.63 at [bookshop.org](http://bookshop.org)]
- Toni Morrison. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Vintage International, 2007. [isbn: 9780307278449; \$13.79 at [bookshop.org](http://bookshop.org)]\*

\*additional readings available on Moodle

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## Meetings/class format

weekly reflections: As you work through the readings it is helpful to consider key passages or connections that you see. Each week you will post a quote that highlights a difficulty, something you hadn't thought of before, or perhaps something you were confused about. Write 250-300 words discussing why that quote stood out to you. Lastly, write 1 question you would like for us to address in our meeting (it does not have to be related to the quote you chose.) Reflections are due by 10am the day of class so that I can read through the questions and plan some responses during our class time.

weekly virtual meetings via zoom: Each week we will meet virtually from 6:30-8:30 (central time). A zoom link will be posted on Moodle. You will already have listened to/read the lecture and read for the week. Our time together will include a short lecture and addressing the questions that emerged and were posted to the forums, and then open up to questions that emerge from those responses and conversation.

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## Assignments/Grading

### *Master's Students*

Weekly Reflection: (30%) see description above.

Critical Pastoral Response: (30%, 40%)

Critical Pastoral Response: In a critical pastoral response students address a scenario that engages questions of race, theology, and identity. Responses are intended to encourage students to translate difficult concepts for the communities they serve as well as demonstrate nuanced and careful use of theological, theoretical, and historical resources to “read” situations and articulate a possible way forward. These responses are built primarily around a body of text that addresses the people in the situation and annotations that narrate the critical work you are bringing to bear in the situation. We will discuss the format and expectations of this assignment during our first in-class meeting.

### *Doctoral Students*

Close reading papers: (25% each) Choose 4 books and write a 5-7 page close reading paper for each book. Close readings examine a particular passage and develop an argument for reading the text and the quote in a particular way. Close readings focus on analysis of the author’s argument and the significance of a particular quote in light of how you are reading the author’s argument. Close readings are charitable, but critical in trying to examine how an author develops an idea within the larger text. These papers should not point to larger cultural realities or connect to other texts.

Attendance: Attendance in synchronous meetings is essential to contribute and synthesize readings and exercises. In cases of serious illness or family emergency contact me as soon as possible. You are responsible for obtaining any notes or announcements from classmates. After the first unexcused absence, the final grade will be reduced by one full letter grade for each additional unexcused absence.

*\*Full course schedule will be posted to Moodle approximately 1 week prior to the first day of class. There is no pre-reading or writing required.*