

Starr King School for the Ministry
Introduction to Womanist TheoEthics

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Summer Intersession, 2014

Syllabus:

This August intensive will provide an introduction to womanist approaches to the study of theology and ethics. Focusing on rehumanizing methodologies grounded in the lived experiences of women of color in Diaspora, this class will offer an intersectional, counter-oppressive lens on moral questions in the day-to-day world. Womanist scholars such as Emilie Townes, Katie Cannon, Delores Williams, Monica Coleman, and Melanie Harris will be used to explore the dismantling of oppression around issues of race, gender and sexuality, and class.

To be read IN ADVANCE of the course (see required texts below):

The materials for this class are emotionally weighty. It is highly recommended that you begin reading well in advance of the class to give the readings the time that they require.

Black Womanist Ethics.

Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd edition.

Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty.

Required Texts:

Please note that there is one additional text for the course that we will be reading during class rather than in advance. There will also be short readings on moodle.

Canon, Katie. *Black Womanist Ethics*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006.
List Price: \$22.00
ISBN: 1597523739

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd edition*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
List Price: \$33.95
ISBN: 0415964725

Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Vintage, 1998.

List Price: \$16.95

ISBN: 0679758690

Townes, Emilie. *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

List Price: \$36.00

ISBN: 1403972737

Course Objectives:

Students are expected to:

- Gain a working vocabulary for the academic study of religious ethics in general, and womanist theoethics specifically;
- Acquire a basic understanding of the foundations of womanist epistemology and methodology;
- Explore the intersections of womanist theology and womanist ethics;
- Diversify their engagement with the dominant canon of black theology by studying scholars, religious traditions, and counter-oppressive perspectives that are often relegated to the margins of the field; and
- Develop a working understanding of the role of religion and ministerial leadership in undermining the effects of interconnected oppressions.

Friday – Origins: The evolution of Womanist methods in the study of Religion

Readings:

Katie Canon, *Black Womanist Ethics*

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*

Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*

Topics:

- Class Covenant and issues of Cultural Misappropriation
- Race, Gender, and Class Oppression
- The Black Woman as the “Mule of the World”
- Women and the Black Church
- The intersection of theology and ethics
- Background for Emilie Townes’ text
- *Video*: Race the Power of an Illusion, Part One
- Exercise: preparation for Sunday worship

Saturday – Methodology vs. Field of Study

Readings:

- Moodle: Alice Walker, “Definition of Womanism”
- Moodle: Katie Canon, “Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick”
- Moodle: JoAnne Marie Terrell, “10-Point Platform for a Womanist Agenda (What Womanists Want)”
- Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, Chps 1-2.

Topics:

- Why is a womanist methodology necessary?
- Use of Black Women’s Literature
- Knowledge production and accountable relationship
- Particularist vs Universalist ethics
- *Video*: Race the Power of an Illusion, Part Two
- Exercise: preparation for Sunday worship

Sunday – Application of Womanist TheoEthics

Readings:

- Moodle: Renita Weems, “Re-Reading for Liberation: African American Women and the Bible”
- Moodle: Angela D. Sims, “Re-orientation: Viewing Justice in a Racially Violent World”
- Moodle: Barbara Holmes, “Every Shut Eye Ain’t Asleep: The Inner Life During Slavery”

Topics:

- Exercise: Morning Worship
- Delores Williams and *Sisters in the Wilderness*
- Melanie Harris’ use of Alice Walker’s biography to expand womanist theoethics
- Use of stereotypes in Emilie Townes’ Work (Mammy, Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, Tragic Mulatta, Black Matriarch, Topsy)
- *Video*: Race the Power of an Illusion, Part Three

Monday – Third Wave Womanism

Readings:

- Moodle: Monica Coleman, “Must I Be Womanist?” (including responses)

- Moodle: Elonda Clay, “Confessions of a Ex-Theological Bitch: The Thickness of Black Women’s Exploitation between Jacquelyn Grant’s ‘Backbone’ and Michael Eric Dyson’s ‘Theological Bitch’”
- Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, Chps 7-8.

Topics:

- Third Wave Womanism: expanding the call for justice
- Womanism and Process Thought
- Ecowomanism
- Sexual Ethics and Sexuality – “Bhomophobia”, “Sexuality and the Black Church”
- African Diasporic Traditions and Multireligious Womanist Thought