

Womanism and Earth Justice

CEST-4554

3 Units

Th 9:40am – 12:30pm

Starr King School for the Ministry – Graduate Theological Union
Fall, 2016

Instructor:

Rev. Sofia Betancourt

sbetancourt@sksm.edu

(510) 549-4725

I am generally in the office Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 10-4. Please email to set a meeting time in order to avoid conflicts with other meetings and my teaching schedule.

Course Description:

“The ground of ecowomanist ethics is watered by multigenerational responses to racial and gender stereotypes in relation to communal knowledge of the land. This wisdom survived through centuries of violence and the daily lived experience of bigotry and abuse in a white supremacist world, and rests on pluralistic understandings of the sacred relationship between human and non-human nature. It remains today as part of the womanist call to accountability and spirit defined in Alice Walker’s writings.”¹

This course will explore the emergent field of ecowomanist ethics in a global context through a wide variety of voices including those of activists, scholars, and grassroots organizers. What do the lived experiences of women in the African Diaspora have to teach us about earth justice and environmental degradation? What moral guidance can we learn from those perspectives? And how might we integrate such wisdom into the wider environmental canon?

This is a residential hybrid class. We will meet weekly for class discussion in a seminar style. Class is limited to 20 students. There are no prerequisites.

¹ Sofia Betancourt, “Between Dishwater and the River: Toward an EcoWomanist Methodology,” *WorldViews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 20, vol. 1 (2016): 64.

Required Text:

There will be course readings for this class on Moodle in addition to the required text below.

Glave, Dianne D. *Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming the African American Environmental Heritage*. Laurence Hill Books, 2010.

List Price: \$18.95 (also available as an e-book)

ISBN: 978-1-55652-766-1

Learning Objectives:

Students are expected to:

- Gain a working vocabulary for the academic study of environmental ethics and womanist methodologies in general, and EcoWomanist thought specifically;
- Acquire a basic understanding of the foundations of Womanist epistemologies and methodologies;
- Diversify their engagement with the dominant canon of environmental ethics 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 working for earth justice.

Course Policies:

Students are expected to complete reading assignments and be prepared for robust discussions of course materials in class. Please contact the instructor regarding accessibility, including any special needs or considerations.

Final paper is due DECEMBER 16th by 11:59pm.

- *Please email instructor by NOVEMBER 10th with a general topic and approach. 1 page max.*
- *Final paper should be 10-15 pages, drawing on course materials in conversation with an earth justice activist, movement, or ideal.*
- *Utilize a womanist methodology to draw on the stories, lived experiences, or cultural inheritances within a specific earth justice movement, approach, or activists' experience to propose an ethical claim that can be applied more broadly to environmental considerations. (We will further discuss what this means in class).*
- *D.Min. students please see instructor for modifications to this assignment.*

Grading:

Grades will be determined as follows:

Class participation – 40%

- (Absences will impact this portion of your grade)
- Preparedness – 30%
(Level of engagement with materials will impact this portion of your grade)
- Final Paper – 30%
(Lateness will impact this portion of your grade)

Class Schedule:

*The instructor reserves the right to modify the schedule and assigned readings to achieve course objectives.

September 8

No readings for this week

Topics:

- Introduction to class
- Evolution of Womanist Thought and Methods in the Study of Religion
- Key Approaches in Environmental Ethics
- What is EcoWomanism?

September 15

Readings:

- Moodle: Melanie L. Harris, “An Ecowomanist Vision”
- *Rooted in the Earth*, introduction and chps. 1-4

Topics

- African American Environmental History, Part I

September 22

Readings:

- Moodle: United Church of Christ 1987. *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*. New York, NY: Commission for Racial Justice. **(pp. xi-27 Only)**
- Moodle: United Church of Christ 2007. *Toxic Wastes and Race at 20*. Cleveland, OH: Justice and Witness Ministries. **(Executive Summary Only)**
- *Rooted in the Earth*, chps. 5-10 and conclusion

Topics:

- African American Environmental History, Part II

September 29

Readings:

- Moodle: Shamara Shantu-Riley, "Ecology is a Sistah's Issue Too: The Politics of Emergent Afrocentric Ecowomanism"
- Moodle: James Cone, "Whose Earth Is It Anyway?"
- Moodle: Val Plumwood, from *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*

Topics:

- Logics of Domination I
- Interconnected Oppressions I – Race, Gender, Class, and Earth Justice

October 6

Readings:

- Moodle: Dorceta Taylor, "Class, Race, Space, and Zoning in America"
- Moodle: Rob Nixon, from *Slow Violence: The Environmentalism of the Poor*
- Moodle: Robert Bullard, from *The Quest for Environmental Justice*

Topics:

- Logics of Domination II
- Interconnected Oppressions II – Race, Gender, Class, and Earth Justice

October 13 – No Class this week.

October 20

Readings:

- Moodle: Melanie L. Harris, "Introduction – Ecowomanism: Earth Honoring Faiths"
- Moodle: Sofia Betancourt, "Between Dishwater and the River"
- Moodle: Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, "Unmasking Evil that Parades as Good"
- Moodle: Jamaica Kincaid, "In History"

Topics:

- EcoWomanism as Methodology

October 27 –No Class, READING WEEK

Reminder that your 1 page max paper proposal is due to the instructor by email on November 10th.

November 3

Readings:

- Moodle: Mercy Oduyoye, "Earth Hope: A Letter"
- Moodle: Layli Maparyan, "Seeds of Light, Flowers of Power, Fruits of Change"

- Moodle: Delores Williams, "Sin, Nature, and Black Women's Bodies"

Topics:

- Emergent EcoWomanist TheoEthics I

November 10

EMAIL PAPER PROPOSALS BY 11:59pm

Readings:

- Moodle: Rose Mary Amegna-Etego, "Nankani Women's Spirituality and Ecology"
- Moodle: Xiumei Pu, "Turning Weapons into Flowers"
- Moodle: Pinto and Harding, "Afro-Brazilian Religion, Resistance, and Environmental Ethics"
- Moodle: Ogbu U. Kalu, "The Sacred Egg: Worldview, Ecology, and Development in West Africa," from *Indigenous Religions and Ecology*

Topics:

- Emergent EcoWomanist TheoEthics II

November 17

Readings:

- Moodle: Jennifer Oladipo, "Porphyrin Rings"
- Moodle: Karen Baker-Fletcher, "To Live as People of Dust and Spirit"
- Moodle: Pamela A. Smith, "Green Lap, Brown Embrace, Blue Body: The Eco-spirituality of Alice Walker"

Topics:

- Womanist EcoSpirituality

November 24 – No class this week, Thanksgrieving

December 1

Readings:

- Majora Carter, "Greening the Ghetto"
https://www.ted.com/talks/majora_carter_s_tale_of_urban_renewal?language=en
- Naomi Davis, "Revitalizing Chicago"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4gcTsTASk&noredirect=1>
- Wangari Maathai, speech at World Forum Lille 2
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSYcmaPRRjU>

- Moodle: bell hooks, from *Belonging: a Culture of Place*

Topics:

- EcoWomanism in the Everyday

December 8

Readings: No readings for this week

Topics:

- EcoWomanism as Earth Justice