

JENNIFER S. LEATH

OFFICE HOURS: BY APPOINTMENT ON THURSDAYS

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Mapping the points of origin and trajectories of justice, in general, and in the United States, in particular, is one of the most significant and sacred tasks of religious and social ethics. Methodologically, on one hand, this course focuses on the work of Michael Sandel as a cartographer of justice ethics and theories of justice in the U.S. On the other hand, this course emphasizes the life, experiences, and moral constellations of and about Afro-Diasporic people and communities in the United States, noting that Afro-Diasporic people remain among the most religious of any demographic group in the U.S. This course provides a survey of Afro-Diasporic religion through the lens of “prophetic” religious traditions. Alongside theories of justice emerging from the works of diverse thinkers including Iris Marion Young, Michael Sandel, Charles Long and Emilie Townes, historians of religion (including Vincent Harding, Bettye Collier-Thomas, and Gary Dorrien) frame the course's central concern with the evolution of justice in theory and praxis in the U.S., preparing class participants to define, explore, and critique the role of the “justice” in both Afro-Diasporic and broader U.S. religious tradition. Specifically, this course will consider implicit and explicit ethical mandates for religion qua pursuits of justice. Through this course, students will learn who has framed justice discourse within the U.S., how this work has been done, and the unique impact by and on the particular demographic of Afro-Diasporic people in the U.S.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To gain a familiarity with Afro-Diasporic moral religious history and theories of justice as they have evolved in the United States.
2. To define, identify, articulate, and analyze the “justice,” especially as it is manifest in Afro-Diasporic U.S. religious traditions.
3. To engage a variety of interdisciplinary literatures, with an emphasis on primary and secondary historical material, to cull common ethical principles beyond and within Afro-Diasporic U.S. religious traditions on justice
4. To develop creative and integrative research skills that enable students to identify strengths and limitations of common ethical principles identified during the course.
5. To imagine the futures of justice oriented Afro-Diasporic U.S. – and broader public – moralities and religiosities.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **COMPLETION OF READING ASSIGNMENTS PRIOR TO THE FIRST CLASS MEETING OF THE WEEK FOR WHICH THE READINGS ARE ASSIGNED.**
- **ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AND PUNCTUAL ATTENDANCE FOR THE CLASS SESSIONS.**
- **CLASS DISCUSSION FACILITATION FOR OF ONE OF THE TEN WEEKS OF CLASS.** Facilitation should provide other

students with (1) a summary of the week's readings, (2) guiding questions adequate to sustain conversation through the class session, (3) additional readings, and (4) at least one thoughtfully selected multi-media resource that deepens engagement with the assigned readings.

- **RESPONSE PAPERS ARE DUE AT 9PM VIA EMAIL ON THE FOLLOWING MONDAYS DURING THE TERM (6 PAGE, DOUBLED-SPACED, 12 POINT FONT): WEEK 4, 7 & 9.** Each paper should: (1) identify and explain a working definition of "justice" in relation to the readings covered in the weeks prior, (2) explain how/why, if at all, this definition has been refined – and why, if it has not been refined, (3) identify and explain one ethical principle that unites the readings covered in the course unit/s corresponding with the assignment week, (4) identify and explain resonances and dissonances between your definition of justice and the ethical principle you have identified.
- **GROUP PRESENTATIONS.** Groups will be formed in the first week of class. Each group will select one of the following autobiographical texts. This text will provide a foundation for your presentation that should: (1) articulate a thorough and descriptive definition of justice as it relates to Afro-Diasporic U.S. religious traditions, drawing from course material; (2) identify and describe the ethical principles that guide the life and faith of the central figure in your group's autobiography; (3) imagine and evaluate the vision of justice this autobiography projects; (4) convey the

ways that this text confirms and challenges the narrative the course has presented with respect to Black U.S. religion, justice, and emphasized ethical principles; (5) utilize and incorporate the interdisciplinary course materials; (6) creatively engage the classroom.

SELECT FROM THE FOLLOWING AUTOBIOGRAPHIES:

- Lorde, Audre. *Zami, a New Spelling of My Name*. Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1982.
- Murray, Pauli. *Pauli Murray: The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989.
- X, Malcolm, and Alex Haley. *Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley, The*. Edited by Anita J. Aboulafia and English Literature Study Guides. New York: Research & Education Association, 1996.

EVALUATION

- You will be graded according to Iliff standards on a letter grading scale. For more information see: www.iliff.edu
- Your grade will be determined according to the following distribution:
 - Preparedness, Participation, Attendance: 10%
 - Class Facilitation: 10%
 - Three Response Papers: 20% each
 - Final Presentation: 20%

OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS

1. **DO NOT plagiarize!** If you have any questions about whether or not what you are doing is plagiarism, go to www.iliff.edu. If you are still unsure, ask before submitting your work.
2. If you are unable to complete the assignments due to physical or mental health reasons, please notify me.
3. Pick a form of citation. Indicate which form you will use. Use it consistently. For more information: www.iliff.edu.

COURSE READINGS

- Long, Charles. *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*. Aurora, Colorado: The Davis Group, Publishers, 1999.
- Sandel, Michael J. *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* Reprint edition. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
- Townes, Emilie M. *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Young, Iris. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

RECOMMENDED

- Collier-Thomas, Bettye. *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion*. New York: Knopf, 2010.
- Dorrien, Gary. *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity, 1950-2005*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- . *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*. 1 edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- . *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805 - 1900*. 1 edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Harding, Vincent. *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*. Reissue edition. Mariner Books, 1993.

Week 1

INTRODUCTIONS

Welcoming Special Guest: Aishah Shahidah Simmons

Week 2

GROUP WORK

Week 3

Long: Part I; **Sandel:** Chapter 1-3; **Townes:** Chapter 1-2; **Young:** Chapter 1-2

Week 4

Long: Chapter 5-6; **Sandel:** Chapter 4-5; **Townes:** Chapter 3; **Young:** Chapter 3

Week 5

Long: Chapter 5-6; **Sandel:** Chapter 6; **Townes:** Chapter 4; **Young:** Chapter 4

Week 6

Long: Chapter 9; **Sandel:** Chapter 7; **Townes:** Chapter 5; **Young:** Chapter 5

Week 7

Long: Chapter 10; **Sandel:** Chapter 8; **Townes:** Chapter 6; **Young:** Chapter 6

Week 8

Long: Chapter 11; **Sandel:** Chapter 9; **Townes:** Chapter 7; **Young:** Chapter 7

Week 9

Long: Chapter 12; **Sandel:** Chapter 10; **Townes:** Chapter 8; **Young:** Chapter 8

Week 10

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

DATE TBD