

Peace Studies 401: Black Lives Matter
Senior Seminar – Black Theology in an American Context (1619-2019)

Core Objective: Each student will

- Develop awareness of African-American culture and history. As part of this objective each student will begin a process of critiquing and de-constructing the dominant cultural history she or he has been taught by American popular culture.

Course Objectives: Each student will

- Develop cross-cultural awareness
- Develop awareness of intersectionality as a conceptual frame of reference for describing and discussing racism and white supremacy as manifestations of social pathologies
- Develop a world view that understands and utilizes intersectionality as a framework for building cross-cultural friendships and collegial relationships with a wide variety of individuals
- Develop a personal commitment to cultural justice
- Develop awareness of the importance of presidential proclamations and executive orders

Required Reading: Presidential History (Proclamations and Executive Orders)

- Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865)
 - Text of the Emancipation Proclamation
<https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation/transcript.html>
- Harry S. Truman (1945-1953)
 - Text of Executive Order # 9981: Desegregation of the Military
<https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=84>
- Lyndon Baines Johnson (1963-1969)
 - Text of Voting Rights Act
<https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=100&page=transcript>

Suggested Readings and Study Materials

- Albus, Harry J. (1953). *Deep River Girl: The Life Story of Marian Anderson*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Press

- Baldwin, James (1992). *The Fire Next Time*. New York, NY: Vintage Reissue Edition/Knopf.
- Canon, Katie. (2006). *Black Womanist Ethics*. Eugene, OR: WIPF and Stock.
- Cone, James. (1984). *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*. Maryknoll, New York. Orbis Books.
- Cone, James. (1997). *God of the Oppressed*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberly (December 7, 2016). *The Urgency of Intersectionality*. Retrieve from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akOe5-UsQ2o>
- Douglas, Frederick. The Meaning of July 4'th for the Negro. (July 5, 1982 (Read by James Earl Jones (July 26, 2008)). Retrieve from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tTkHJWxfP0>. See also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kkzmn6UyaSA>
- Griffin, John Howard (2010). *Black Like Me*. New York, NY: Berkley Publishing.
- Harding, Vincent. The Beggars Are Rising. Where Are the Saints? *Mennonite Life* (22). October, 1967. Pp. 150-152.
- Harding, Vincent. (2010). *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the History of the Movement*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Jackson, Jessie. (2019). *Keeping Hope Alive: Sermons and Speeches of Rev. Jessie L. Jackson*. Maryknoll New York. Orbis Books.
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. (April 16, 1963). *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. Retrieve from: https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. and James M.. Washington. (2003). *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*. New York, NY: Harper/One
- Audre Lorde. (2007). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York, NY: Crossing Press..
- Audre Lorde. (October 29, 1979). *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House: The Personal and the Political: Comments at The Second Sex Conference*. Retrieve from: http://s18.middlebury.edu/AMST0325A/Lorde_The_Masters_Tools.pdf
- Meachem, J. (2020). *His Truth is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope*. New York, NY: Random House.

- Moyers, Bill. *Amazing Grace: The Documentary*. Retrieve from <https://billmoyers.com/content/amazing-grace-bill-moyers/>
- Norman, Jessye. (1995). Kennedy Center honors Sidney Poitier. Retrieve from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5jZe32DEYI>
- Williams, Delores.(2013). *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis
- Robeson, Paul (1936). *Old Man River*. Retrieve from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eh9WayN7R-s>
- Cornell West. (2002). *Prophecy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press
- Zinn, Howard (2005). *A People's History of the United States*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classic.

Introductory Comments to Required Assignment

I have long believed that biography is one way to enter historical discussions. The lives we humans actually live provide a window into our personalities, our personal values, and our collective cultural histories. In my view, the individual serves as a hologram to the whole or to the collective. As we understand the biographical histories and life trajectories of individuals, we begin to understand our own lives and our personal life stories. This understanding of our own lives and cultures enables us to understand the lives of others. It enables us to explore and to understand our collective histories. Investigating the interaction of individual lives with their historical eras and cultures is a rich source for understanding our collective as well as our individual lives. Our culture's various anthropologies, sociologies, and psychologies all point us in the direction of understanding the individual as one key to understanding the whole, i.e., the collective.

For the past month I have been waking to concerns about issues of race and social justice in my homeland. In my mind I collate the individuals whose lives can inform us about the whole. John Lewis' death deeply affected me. As I watched the funeral services and as I read Jon Meacham's book about Lewis, I revisited my historical past.ⁱ For the past month I have been pondering the concept of intersectionality in black lives. Race matters; class matters, educational levels matter; gender matters, geographic locale matters, patterns of government matter: none of these can be ignored in our search to understand our nation's long history of

ethnic violence and systemic racism. Nothing can be turned aside as irrelevant as we seek to examine our own social location inside a racist culture.

I begin as a twentieth-century white woman. My understanding of black history and culture was first shaped in the 1950's and 1960's in Eastern Pennsylvania – inside an all white ethnic Anabaptist-Mennonite community. There was one black student in my public junior high school; none in my senior high school. No where was I taught about black history – not even as my high school problems of democracy class visited the Gettysburg battlefield; even as we celebrated Lincoln's birthday as a national holiday.

My high school graduating class visited Washington, DC as its senior class trip. We visited the monuments but not the battlefields. No one talked to us about the human beings who lived in the slums which were visible to the eyes but invisible to the spirit. No one told us that slaves built the White House. No one told us that slaves helped in the construction of the United States Capitol building.

I saw the slums from the Washington Monument but had no language to explain to myself what I was seeing at, so-to-speak, arm's length. I was, however, deeply troubled by what I was seeing – but had no useful language to ask questions about my distress. I was, therefore, silent and silenced about my feelings.

My personal awareness (begun years earlier) began to develop with a birthday gift – the book *Deep River Girl* about the classical singer Marion Anderson. My parents also gave me a vinyl recording of the spirituals as performed by Anderson. I loved the music and tried to sound like her when I sang along. Soon after that decade ended, I became aware of Martin Luther King and his advocacy work for his people. By the time I graduated from high school, I was abstractly and vaguely aware that my nation had a race problem.

However, none of my college religion courses, and none of my college history courses addressed the racial divide in North America not did it address slavery as a festering sore – a cancerous lesion - in the nation's history. My literature classes did not assign black authors. My arts classes did not identify black artists. Black invisibility was almost – but not quite – 100%.

As a college sophomore, however, I bought and read John Howard Griffin's book (*Black Like Me*). I met Vincent and Rosemarie Harding; one of my best friends married a black man. I had my first black and college classmate and friend. As a junior, I subscribed to *Ebony Magazine*, traveled to Fisk University in Nashville for a weeklong seminar for college students about race relations in the context of American history. The Nashville restaurant counter and theater sit-ins were in progress. I subscribed to *MOTIVE Magazine*. Eventually, by my senior year, I had read James Baldwin's book *The Fire Next Time*.

I wrote my first paper about racial inequalities during graduate school in 1964. This year was the first time I marched for civil rights. This was the first time I began to go into a predominantly black community to hear the black comedian Dick Gregory. I remained naïve, however, about my personal participation in white privilege.

When I look back on my individual life history and I think about my nation's cultural history during my lifetime I am aware that very few individuals helped me to understand what I was reading; what I was learning. The idea, for example, of a black president or a black senator or a black preacher or a black governor was simply outside my conceptual capacities to imagine. The idea of a black physician or a black therapist was not accessible to me. The whole concept of intersectionality and cross-cultural learning was in my future.

I do not think I am the exception.

In my night time reveries about black power, black music, black culture, black religious expressions (such as Black Christianity, Black Islam, Black Nationalism and Black Power), I have gone over and over my life history. In response to these internalized mutterings,

As a result of these night-time mutterings, I have put together this worksheet – a study tool for the present moment; a study guide for a course I will never teach. The goals of such a worksheet and such a course are simple ones – to replace centuries of culture-bred ignorance with accurate information; to teach our collective future about our collective past; to work toward a culture of inclusion for everyone – no matter their racial history or their skin color.ⁱⁱ

Windows – Learning From Biography The Who List

Instructions:

Select eight or ten names from the list below. Research these individuals and their life histories and socio-cultural context. Then write a short paragraph about their personal identities; what they believed; and what they accomplished in their lifetimes. Don't rush this process. Utilize multiple sources and let each individual teach you about his or her life and its struggles and accomplishments.

The list is not all-inclusive. I have sought to include people we have all heard about as well as people we have never heard about. I personally believe that a wide cultural perspective is needed. We need to understand the arts; we need to research the politics of a given person and a given historical era. I believe sports are an art form – similar but different from the visual arts, the musical arts, the dramatic arts. Allowed a voice, individuals and entire cultures find unique ways to express themselves.

After you have studied ten individual's lives, go on to another ten and repeat the process. As you work your way through the list, add names that are important ones to you. Add names that you uncover in your studies.

Take breaks along the way to find your own voice; to give your body-mind the opportunity to absorb what you are learning. Allow your studies to challenge you and to inspire you. Think about what is important and think about how you are utilizing this time of study and reflection to change your self-other awareness. Ask what you can do and what you need to do to change the trajectory of racism in our collective culture and in your personal life.

- Stacy Abrams
- Yamiche Alcindor
- Muhammed Ali – Cassius Clay
- Octavia Albert
- Richard Allen
- Marian Anderson
- Trevell Anderson
- Maya Angelou

- Louis Armstrong
- Arthur Ashe
- Wilma Ann Bailey
- James Baldwin
- Edward Mitchell Bannister
- Brian Bantam
- William Barber, II
- James Bartley
- Kathleen Battle
- Ida B. Wells Barnett
- Sean Bell
- Harry Bellefonte
- LeeRoy Berry
- Simone Biles
- W. E. B. Du Bois
- Cory Booker
- Charles Octavius Booth
- Keith Boykin
- Carole Mosley Braun
- John Brown (Harper's Ferry Uprising)
- Michael Brown
- James Brown
- Tony Brown
- Willie Brown
- Guion Stewart Bluford, Jr.
- Keith Augustus Burton
- Katie Canon
- Stokeley Carmichael
- Diahann Carrol
- George Washington Carver
- Ray Charles
- Shirley Chisholm
- Eldridge Cleaver
- Michelle Clift
- Joe Coe
- Bessie Coleman
- James Cone
- Kimberly Cremsshaw
- Elijah Cummings
- Michael Curry

- Jason David
- Angela Davis
- Jefferson Davis
- Amado Diallo
- Frederick Douglas
- Kelly Brown Douglas
- W. E. B. DuBois
- James Durham
- Karen A. Ellis
- Duke Ellington
- Carl Ellis
- Cain Hope Felder
- Bruce L. Fields
- Lisa Fields
- George Floyd
- Morgan Freeman
- Aretha Franklin\
- Eric Garner
- Whoopi Goldberg
- Dick Gregory
- Winton Gregory
- Richard Theodore Greener
- Wendell Griffin
- Eric Halder
- Fannie Lou Hamer
- Rachel Harding
- Rosemarie Feeney Harding
- Vincent Harding
- Kamala Harris
- Lamuel Hayes
- Sally Hennings
- Anita Hill
- Jarett Hill
- Mona Holmes
- Ashley Holt
- Lena Horne
- Robert E. Hood
- Dwight N. Hopkins
- Zora Neale Hurston
- Gwen Ifill

- Jessie Jackson
- Mahalia Jackson
- Susan Jackson
- Kendra James
- William James Jennings
- Taylor John
- Spencer Johnson
- Star Jossel
- James Earl Jones
- Barbara Jordan
- Michael Jordan
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Coretta Scott King
- Martin Luther King, Sr.
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
- James Lark
- Juanita Lark
- Jarena Lee
- Spike Lee
- Little Rock Nine
- James Logan
- Audre Lorde
- Edmonia Lewis
- John Lewis
- Loretta Lynch
- Mary Eliza Mahoney
- Wynton Marsalis
- Armaldo Tamayo Mendez
- Kerry James Marshall
- Donald H. Mathews
- Benjamin Elijah Mays
- Elijah Muhammad
- Tony Morrison
- Dwight McKissie
- Pauli Murray
- Jessye Norman
- Huey Newton
- Barack Obama
- Michelle Obama
- Sylvester Outley

- Jessie Owens
- Gordon Parks
- Rosa Parks
- P.B. S. Pinchback
- Sidney Poitier
- Colin Powell
- Charlie Pride
- Prince
- Richard Pryor
- Donovan X. Ramsey
- Ayn Rand
- Joy Ann Reid
- Hiram Rhodes Revels
- Condoleezza Rice
- Paul Robeson
- Smokey Robinson
- Cornish Rogers
- Nellie Taylor Ross
- Bayard Rustin
- Babe Ruth
- Tywanda Sanders
- Augusta Savage
- Love Sechrest
- Ntozake Shange
- Al Sharpton
- William Tecumseh Sherman
- Daniel Simmons
- Ruth Simmons
- Mitzi Smith
- Eileen J. Southern
- Alton Sterling
- Debra Prothrow Stith
- Regina Shands Stoltzfus
- Brionna Taylor
- Gardner Taylor
- Clarence Thomas
- Howard Thurman
- Emmett Till
- Sojourner Truth
- Emerita Beverly Daniel Tatum

- Harriet Tubman
- Dorothy Tucker
- Denmark Vesey
- Alice Walker
- Booker T. Washington
- Ethel Waters
- Erik Watkins
- Beverly White
- Serena Williams
- Venus Williams
- Oprah Winfrey
- Cornell West
- Delores Williams
- Phyllis Wheatley
- Stevie Wonder
- Tiger Woods
- Malcolm X

Honorary Members

- Anglican Bishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu of South Africa
- President Nelson Mandela of South Africa
- Mahatma Gandhi of India
- Miles Horton of the United States; Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, TN
- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Herschel of the United States
- Don West of the United States, Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, TN
- Nelle Morton, Fellowship of Southern Churchmen and Professor emerita, Drew University, United States

Endnotes

When I marched in Selma I felt as if my legs were praying.

Rabbi Abraham Herschel

ⁱ Meacham, John (2020). *His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope*. New York, New York: Random House.

ⁱⁱ I do not personally know the lives and works of all of these individuals. I began with what I know – from inside my worldview and then asked others for additions to the list. Then I used the computer’s search engine to ask questions – pulling up, for example, the names of the first black individuals to be elected to the United States Congress. I included individuals from a wide spectrum of American life and culture. It is quite likely that I did not remember important individuals in the struggle for equality and human dignity during these past 400 years. Some of these individuals are well known to many of us. To others of us, they are strangers. I believe the artists – most especially musicians – express the soul of a nation – our individual and collective longings for wholeness. Certainly, for me, the music of my generation has expressed not only my personal longing for wholeness but also our collective urgency to find and create wholeness for ourselves, our generation, and for the generations yet to be born.

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