Course Objectives

The course will explore the dominant theoretical approaches to and methodological understandings of freedom, tradition, liberation, and revelation in Black religion and Africana philosophy in late 20th century writings. By turning to feminist/womanist thought, Black Nationalism, pragmatism, phenomenology and existentialism, the course will provide critical insight into the nature (s) of religion, the uses (and possible abuses) of theological claims in political discourse, and the guiding moral principles within social protest movements.

This course is a Doyle Seminar, part of the Doyle Engaging Difference Program, a new campus-wide curricular initiative. The initiative offers faculty the opportunity to enhance the student research component of upper-level seminars that address questions of national, social, cultural, religious, moral, and other forms of difference. The Doyle seminars are intended to deepen student learning about diversity and difference through enhanced research opportunities, interaction with thought leaders, and dialogue with the Georgetown community and beyond.

Course Guidelines and Requirements:

This course is a seminar, and while some background material may be presented in lecture format at the beginning of class, a significant portion of class time will be devoted to individual oral presentations, group discussion, and in-class writing projects. The success of
this class will depend on, in part, your active and informed participation in classroom debates and willingness to work collaboratively with your peers in and outside the classroom context. To this end, it is expected that you will attend all classes, carefully read all assigned material before class, thoughtfully participate in class discussions, meet (when necessary) with your assigned writing partner, provide constructive feedback on written and oral projects presented by your peers and complete in a timely manner all written assignments. You are required to complete the following oral and written assignments:

(1) You are required to facilitate at least one classroom discussion, which will involve an oral presentation that offers a discussion (not a summary) of the assigned readings. You will create your presentation by building a prezi. [http://prezi.com](http://prezi.com) A prezi is a software package, much like powerpoint, that enables you to think in non-linear and more relational fashion about your work and course readings. This non-graded presentation should shed light on the major arguments at hand as well as offer critical insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the readings.

(2) You will complete three writing assignments:

(a) **textual analysis paper** (2-3 pages) --- This will be a close reading of an assigned text, placing a special emphasis on examining a particular problem in the reading. The goal is to provide a critical analysis and assessment of the reading, not simply to affirm the author’s argument.

(b) **textual analysis paper with secondary sources** --- This writing assignment will require you to weave together secondary resources into your critical reflection of the assigned text or texts. Building upon the first writing assignment, this essay requires you to offer a close reading of a passage in the context of an ongoing scholarly debate the overt or latent themes within the
reading at hand.

(c) **research paper** (15 pages) --- You are required to write a research paper that weaves together primary and secondary sources on a theme tied to Black religion’s role in shaping one the following: the Black Power movement, constructing liberation discourses in the post-cold war era or developing counter and/or broader conceptions of gender, sexuality and moral agency in the modern West. Please consult with me prior to submitting the draft of your research paper.

(3) You will be assigned a writing partner, and prior to submitting any written work you will submit an electronic draft to your writing partner. After you have read your partner’s essay, you will write one or two paragraphs that indicate the strengths and weaknesses of the paper, and meet in person or via web chat to discuss your partner’s comments. The draft essay, with comments from your writing partner, should be uploaded to blackboard on or before the due date of the assigned writing exercise.

(4) You will be required to attend all class-sponsored public lectures, most of which will take place on campus between 4 pm and 6 pm on a given Tuesday or Thursday.

**Technology in the classroom**

You are required to bring the assigned readings to class and be prepared to discuss passages at length. If you have an electronic copy of the material, you may bring to class your computers or other technology to access the readings. Please note: you may not use your electronic devices for anything other than reading the assigned material and taking notes.

**Grading**
Your final grade will be determined by the development of your work as the semester progresses, and your final grade should reflect that trajectory. This means that I will not evaluate each task with percentage accuracy (your final research paper, for instance, is not worth, say, 40% of your grade). Instead, I will examine all your work as a single project, and provide a grade that expresses the work and attention rendered to class assignments and classroom participation. This process also allows me to take into account improvement during the course of the semester. On blackboard, you will find my grading rubric for writing assignments. How will I calculate classroom participation? If you attend class regularly, but do not participate in classroom discussions, you will receive a B or B- for this portion of your grade; if, on the other hand, you are an active participant in classroom debates, you will receive an A or A- for classroom participation.

Two final points: (1) Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you borrow ideas and/or lift sentences without proper citation, you will receive an automatic F in the course; (2) classroom attendance and participation are mandatory. You are allowed three absences; your fourth absence, unless you are hospitalized and submit documentation from your Dean verifying your illness/hospitalization, will result in a reduction of your final grade by a full letter grade; so an A- will convert into a B-.

Books for Purchase

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*
J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*
James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*
Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*
Tracey Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism*
Delores Williams, *Sisters of the Wilderness*
Week One
Introduction

Week Two
“The Problem of Blackness”

January 14 (Fanon, Introduction and Chapters 1,2)

January 16 (Fanon, Chapters 3,5,8)

Week Three
“Natures of Black Religion”

January 23 (The Religion of Black Power,” V. Harding)*
“The Black Manifesto” and “Black Power, Black People, Theological Renewal,” Gayraud S. Wilmore)*

Week Four
“Black Power and the Crisis of Politics ”

January 28 (Black Power, Chapters 1-3)
January 30 (Black Power, Chapters 4-7)

Textual analysis paper (2-3 double-spaced pages) is due on or before January 31. Upload your essay to Blackboard. Please analyze the following from Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks: “I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut way slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it’s a Negro!”

Week Five
“Historical Perspectives on the Black Power Movement”

February 4 (Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour,)
February 6 (Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour,)

Week Six
“Building a Theology of Liberation”

February 11 (A Black Theology of Liberation, Chapters 1-4)
February 13 (A Black Theology of Liberation, Chapters 5-7)

Week Seven
“Gender, God-talk and Liberation”

February 18 (Sisters in the Wilderness, Chapters 1-3 & 5)
February 20 (Sisters in the Wilderness, Chapters 6-8)
Week Eight  “Theology’s Problem of Race”
February 25 (Race: A Theological Account, Chapters 1-2)
February 27 (Race: A Theological Account, Chapters 4, 5 & 7)

Textual analysis paper with secondary resources (5 double-spaced pages) is due on or before March 2. Upload your papers to Blackboard. Do not simply offer a close reading of the text; instead, examine the reading in relation to the concerns or questions raised by at least two but no more than three scholars. Your essay should illustrate the degree to which your critical insights compare and contrast to the views raised by other scholars who are engaging the themes within the passage under examination.

Please respond to the following from Sisters in the Wilderness: “The wilderness experience, as religious experience, was transforming. Its structure was physical isolation (of slave from salve environment); establishing a relation (between Jesus and slave); healing by Jesus (of whatever malady afflicted the slave); transformation (conversion of the slave’s more secular bent to a thoroughly religious bent); and motivation to return (to the slave community) changed for the better. So, for African-American slaves, female and male, the wilderness did not bear the negative connotations that mainline white pioneer culture had assigned to it. Rather, for the slave, the wilderness was a positive place conducive to uplifting the spirit and to strengthening religious life. Wilderness experience, involving a compatible relation between humans and nature, was to be sought actively” (113)

Week Nine  “New Challenges Facing Liberation Theology”
March 4 (Pinn, Why, Lord? Charles Long)
March 6 (Monica Coleman, “Ain’t I a Womanist, Too?, Anderson’s Beyond Ontological Blackness, Sneed, “Black Liberation Theology, Cultural Critique and the Problem of Homosexuality)

One-page research paper topic and bibliography are due on or before March 8. Please upload your work to blackboard.

Spring Break March 8-16

Week Ten  “Beyond Christian Liberation Thought”
March 18 (Turner Richard, Islam in the African-American Experience)*
March 20 (Marable, (Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention, Chapters 3,4
Week Eleven
“Reimaging Africa in the U.S.: Yoruba and Nationalism”
March 25 (Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism)
March 27 (Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism)

Week Twelve
“Innocence and the Future of the Race”
April 1 (The Fire Next Time)
April 3 (The Fire Next Time)

Week Thirteen
“Innocence Part II”
April 8 (The Fire Next Time)
April 10 In-class group writing

Week 14
“Reflecting Black: Religion and the Possibility of Liberation
April 15 (Please bring your favorite assigned reading or readings to class as I provide a overview of the course and offer my thoughts on the future of liberation theology)

Week 15
Student Presentations
April 22
April 24

Research paper, is due on or before May 10. Please upload your paper to blackboard.