

BI 567

# African American Biblical Interpretation (English Exegesis)

## Format(s)

Online and Residential

## Semester

Spring 2021

## Instructor

Professor: Matthew Schlimm, Ph.D.

Preferred Title: Dr. Matt

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## Course Description

This course examines the interplay between the Bible and race with particular attention to the experiences of African Americans. Topics are biblical, historical, and theological in nature. Biblically, the course will examine not only the Bible's explicit teachings on race, but also ways that the biblical narrative (such as the exodus story) has informed black identity. Historically, the class will focus on slavery, its abolition, the civil rights movement, the Pan-African movement, as well as more contemporary issues. Theologically, students will gain exposure to ideas from liberationist, postcolonial, and black theologians. Successful completion of the class provides a solid understanding of both exegesis and the Black experience in America.

## Text(s), Readings, and Materials

### Required Textbooks:

1. McCaulley, Esau. *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020. ISBN: 978-0830854868.
2. One of the following study Bibles:

- Coogan, Michael, ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-0190276089.
  - Green, Joel, ed. *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Common English Bible, 2013. ISBN: 978-1609260286.
3. One of the following volumes:
    - For those wanting a NT commentary: Blount, Brian K., et al., eds. *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007. ISBN: 978-0800634216.
    - For those wanting a discussion of OT women: Gafney, Wilda. *Womanist Midrash : A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0664239039.
    - For those wanting an OT commentary: Page, Jr., Hugh R., et al., eds. *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010. ISBN: 978-0800621254.
  4. One of the books from the bibliography at the end of this document (for book review and presentation).
  5. Other resources available through the web or our library.

## Recommended Textbook:

The following book provides structure to much of the class and the basis for Dr. Matt's lectures. It is thus recommended for students wanting to study matters more deeply. However, it is not required.

Callahan, Dwight Allen. *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. ISBN: 9780300136166.

## Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course will:

1. Explain how the Bible has been used as an instrument of both oppression and liberation.
2. Describe key issues facing black communities today.
3. Articulate how the Bible addresses situations faced by black communities.
4. Demonstrate how African American interpretation of the Bible tends to differ from white and Eurocentric interpretation.

In keeping with the stated purpose of the M.Div. degree ("to serve the one God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and prepare women and men for faithful, compassionate, and effective pastoral ministry"), this course helps meet the following M.Div. curricular objectives:

- Be formed by, live in, and minister out of Scripture and the historical and theological tradition of the church.
- Interpret the Christian Scriptures through faithful exegesis and in light of the Christian tradition.
- Preach the Word of God with faithfulness and clarity.

Additionally, this course helps meet the following MAMD curricular objective:

- Articulate and reflect critically and constructively on the biblical and theological foundations of God's mission to the world.

Additionally, this course helps meet the following MACL curricular objective:

- The student will be able to identify and interpret key themes from the Christian scriptures.

### Performance Expectations:

1. Attend all class sessions and other required activities.
2. Have and use all textbooks and required materials
3. Meet all deadlines.
4. Prepare adequately for each class session using appropriate study strategies.
5. Do your own work.
6. Listen actively and carefully in class, including following all directions.
7. Participate in class activities and discussions.
8. Write and speak effectively and appropriately.
9. Spend five hours a week outside of class reading and preparing for class.

### Technology Requirements:

1. **Electronic Communication:** Students are expected to check their UD e-mail accounts regularly for course updates and University announcements. Instructions for forwarding e-mail from a dbq.edu account can be found at the Technology Services link on the UD Web Page.
2. Students are expected to login on a regular basis to the class **Moodle page** to access course resources, such as the syllabus and readings.
3. Students are required to have a working **webcam and microphone** because they will give video presentations during the semester.

### Student Evaluation & Grading:

#### 1. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- A. **Quizzes (20%):** Students are expected to take quizzes on a weekly basis covering lecture material.
- B. **Commentary Comparison (10%):** Examine how a biblical text is treated in either *True to Our Native Land*, *Womanist Midrash*, or *The Africana Bible*. Then examine how the same text is treated in either the Anchor Bible Commentary, Word Biblical Commentary, Interpretation, the New Interpreter's Bible, or *Women's Bible Commentary* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Westminster John Knox). Write a paper 300 words or less explaining the similarities and differences in each treatment.
- C. **Book Review and Presentation (15%):** Prepare a presentation of a book from the bibliography at the end of this document. Your presentation should review the book, explaining [1] its thesis, [2] its organization, [3] the most insightful parts of the book, [4] why anyone should read the book, and [5] any critiques.
- D. **Biblical Resources & Social Problem Paper (20%):** Identify a social problem impacting African American communities. Using solid research, explain the issue. Describe relevant biblical texts. Point to possible solutions. Length: 1000 words or less.
- E. **Tackling Racism in Churches with the Bible (20%):** Explain how racism can best be tackled in your church or a white church in your area. Describe common assumptions people make, what moves them to change, and how the Bible can make them better people. Length: 1000 words or less.

- F. **Final Reflection Paper (15%):** Write a paper 600 words or less explaining how the class opened new ways of approaching the Bible.
- G. **Robust Participation** in all facets of the course is assumed. Failure to participate can result in the loss of one's final grade by a letter grade or more.

## 2. GRADING SCALE

93 – 100%	A
90 – 92%	A-
87 – 89%	B+
83 – 86%	B
80 – 82%	B-
77 – 79%	C+
73 – 76%	C
70 – 72%	C-
67 – 69%	D+
63 – 66%	D
0 – 62%	F

## 3. REQUIREMENTS & OBJECTIVES

Course requirements are designed to help students fulfill objectives, as the following table explains:

Learning Goal:	Quizzes	Commentary Comparison	Book Review	Social Problem Paper	Tackling Racism Paper	Final Reflection Paper
1. Explain the Bible as Tool of Oppression and Liberation	X	X		X	X	X
2. Gain an understanding of key issues facing black communities today.		X		X	X	
3. Articulate how the Bible addresses situations faced by black communities.	X		X	X	X	
4. Demonstrate how African American interpretation of	X	X				X

the Bible tends to differ from white and Eurocentric interpretation.						
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## Bibliography:

Students are required to choose a book from the list below and give a class presentation on it. For any book over 250 pages, students are welcome to work with the professor to choose appropriate chapters. Students will receive additional instructions so they do not choose the same book as someone else.

Bailey, Randall C., editor. *Yet With A Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation*. Semeia Studies 42. Atlanta: SBL, 2003.

Barber, II, William J., with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement Is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear*. Boston: Beacon, 2016.

Bowens, Lisa M. *African American Readings of Paul: Reception, Resistance, and Transformation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020.

Brooks, Gennifer Benjamin. *Good News Preaching: Offering the Gospel in Every Sermon*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_, editor. *Black United Methodists Preach!* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012.

Brown, Teresa Fry. *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003.

Butler, Jr., Lee H. *A Loving Home: Spirituality, Sexuality, and Healing Black Life*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

Chappell, David L. *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Collier-Thomas, Bettye. *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850–1979*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.

Cone, James. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Black Theology and Black Power*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018.

Crawford, Evans E. *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.

- Crowder, Stephanie Buckhanon. *When Momma Speaks: The Bible and Motherhood from a Womanist Perspective*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016.
- DiAngelo, Robin and Michael Eric Dyson. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. Boston: Beacon, 2018.
- Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Autobiographies: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave; My Bondage and My Freedom; Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates. The Library of America 68. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1994.
- Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.
- Dyson, Michael Eric. *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King Jr.* New York: The Free Press, 2000.
- Felder, Cain Hope, editor. *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Garvey, Marcus. *Selected Writings and Speeches of Marcus Garvey*. Edited by Thomas Crawford. Dover Thrift Edition. Dover, 2012.
- Gilbert, Kenyatta. *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011.
- Hayes, Diane L and Cyprian Davis, eds. *Taking Down Our Harps: Black Catholics in the United States*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.
- Hood, Robert E. *Begrimed and Black: Christian Traditions on Blacks and Blackness*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.
- Junior, Nyasha. *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015.
- Junior, Nyasha, and Jeremy Schipper. *Black Samson: The Untold Story of an American Icon*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- King, Jr., Martin Luther. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writing and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Edited by James M. Washington. New York: HarperOne, 2003.
- Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl A, and Tina Pippin. *Mother Goose, Mother Jones, Mommie Dearest: Biblical Mothers and Their Children*. Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009.
- LaRue, Cleophus. *The Heart of Black Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster, 2000.

- Marsh, Charles. *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- McMickle, Marvin A. *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Time To Speak: How Black Pastors Can Respond to the HIV/AIDS Pandemic*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Where Have All the Prophets Gone? Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge and Hope*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2000.
- Menakem, Resmaa. *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017.
- Mitchell, Henry H. *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.
- Mitchem, Stephanie Y. *Introducing Womanist Theology*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002.
- Page, Jr., Hugh R. *Israel's Poetry of Resistance: Africana Perspectives on Early Hebrew Verse*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013.
- Patterson, Sheron C. *New Faith: A Black Christian Woman's Guide to Reformation, Re- Creation, Rediscovery, Renaissance, Resurrection, and Revival*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Phillips, Nichole. *Patriotism Black and White; the Color of American Exceptionalism*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2019.
- Powery, Luke. *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching Death and Hope*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.
- Powery, Emerson B. and Rodney S. Sadler, Jr. *The Genesis of Liberation: Biblical Interpretation in the Antebellum Narratives of the Enslaved*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016.
- Raboteau, Albert. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Ross, Rosetta. *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion and Civil Rights*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.
- Simmons, Martha and Frank A. Thomas. *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010.
- Smith, Mitzi J. *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Insights from African American Interpretation. Reading the Bible in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017.

- Stevenson, Brian. *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2014.
- Thandeka. *Learning to Be White: Money, Race, and God in America*. New York: Continuum, 1999.
- Thomas, Frank. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2013.
- Thompson, Lisa. *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2018.
- Tisby, Jemar. *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.
- Turner, Nat. *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. (Available through various publishers; try to use an unabridged edition.)
- Tyson, Timothy B. *Blood Done Sign My Name: A True Story*. New York: Three Rivers, 2004.
- Wilson-Hartgrove. *Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2018.
- Wimbush, Vincent L., and Rosamond C. Rodman, editors. *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2012.
- Woodson, Carter G. *The Mis-education of the Negro*. (Available through various publishers; try to use an unabridged edition.)