Course Description

Black Womanist Consciousness and American Public Life

OLLI0076

Friday, July 16-Friday, August 20, 2021
9:30-10:45 am

Instructor: Amy E. Steele, Ph.D., amy.e.steele@vanderbilt.edu

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Course Description:

Building upon Katie Geneva Canon's seminal essay, “The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness” in her 1995 book *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, this course explores the rise of Black Women’s political participation in American public life from Reconstruction to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The course will examine democratic dilemmas in religion and public life and struggles of justice for Black women with particular focus on the U.S. South.

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will be able to Compare and contrast classical, medieval, and contemporary nuances of the ‘public.’
2. Students will be able to examine some of the problems of religion in public life to understand how Black women have used religion as a basis for public engagement.
3. Students will be able analyze the origins and trajectory of the term ‘womanist’ and to apply its meaning to social ethics and public policy.
4. Students will be able to evaluate what ideas contribute to black womanist consciousness and to explain its importance to American public life.
5. Students will be able to identify and connect shared values and the challenges between Black women over the course of several decades to design strategies for thinking about policy that privileges Black women’s advancement.
6. Students will be able to discuss the development of Black womanist consciousness around modern issues in American public life in order to evaluate intentioned and unintentional roadblocks to participation for other groups.

**Module 1a  Introduction**

**Lesson 1**  Syllabus, Expectations, Navigating the Course, Communal Covenant

**Lesson 2**  On Consciousness

**Discussion:**  What does the title of our course mean?

In class poll:

Mixed media:

**Key words:** consciousness, Black womanism

**Lesson 1b- The Public**

**Lesson 1**  How the idea of ‘the public’ has changed over time.

**Lesson 2**  problem of private vs. public

**Lesson 3**  problem of religion in public life
Additional readings/Videos:

In-video quizzing/polls:

Discussion board:

**Module 2- Womanist**

Lesson 1  Walker’s trope

Lesson 2  The ways the trope is employed in academic black womanist scholarship

Lesson 3  Use of the trope for public discourse and participation

In video-quiz/polls:

Discussion Board:

Additional Readings/videos:

**Module 3  Contributions to Black Womanist Consciousness**

Lesson 1  Black Religions (First Wave, Second, Wave, Third, Millennial)

Lesson 2  Political Consciousness and Methodologies for Social Change
  a. Freedom (Harriet/Abolitionist Movement)
  b. Respectability (women's clubs, sororities, HBCUs)
  c. Suffrage (Sojourner)
  d. Lynching (Ida b. Wells)
  e. Desegregation (Ella Baker, Diane Nash, and Jo Ann Robinson)
  f. Mass Incarceration (Michelle Alexander)
g. Disenfranchisement (Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, XX)

Lesson 3 The Arts (Phyllis Wheatley, Black Arts Movement, Women’s Magazines-Noliwe, the novelist and poet)

In video-quiz/polls:

Discussion Board:

Additional Readings/videos:

Module 4 Limits of Black Womanist Consciousness

Lesson 1 the problem of citizenship (Michelle Harris Perry)

Lesson 2 the problem of culture (Townes/tropes)

Lesson 3 the problem of church (Kelly Brown Douglas)

Lesson 4 the democratic challenge (the case of Chisholm, Braun, Waters, Obama, Harris)

In video-quiz/polls:

Discussion Board:

Additional Readings/videos:

Module 5 Identifying Shared Values
Lesson 1: Religion in Public Life

Lesson 2: Moral Consciousness

In video-quiz:

Discussion Board:

Additional Readings/videos:

Module 6: Ultimate threats to Black Women's Participation in Public Life

Lesson 1: White Supremacy and the Patriarchal Demise

Lesson 2: Denial of intersectionality and critical race theory

Lesson 3: Cultural Aesthetic Assault

In video-quiz:

Discussion Board:

Additional Readings/videos: