

# **HT 567-60 – Christianity and Racial Justice**

## **University of Dubuque Theological Seminary**

### **Fall Semester 2019 (3 credits)**

#### **Online**

#### **FACULTY INFORMATION**

Professor: Dr. David W. Congdon

Phone: (503) 341-8746

Email: [dwcongdon@gmail.com](mailto:dwcongdon@gmail.com)

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

James Cone once said that racism is America's "original sin," and the struggle for racial justice is the enduring challenge for the American church. This course will survey the history of Christianity's connection to and complicity in racism, examine the origins of race in colonial missions, explore the theological and intercultural resources for addressing structural racism, and discuss practical strategies for moving toward a more racially just society. Students will learn to be conversant in basic concepts from critical race theory and learn how to integrate them into their theological and pastoral work.

While the course will focus especially on the struggle for Black liberation in light of this country's history of slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration—with the corresponding movements of abolitionism, civil rights, and Black Lives Matter—we will also look at Indigenous/Native American, Latinx, and Asian American struggles against racial injustice. In addition, the course will place the US church's role in systemic racism and the pursuit of racial justice in a global context. Because racism is integrally connected with colonialism, the course will touch on decoloniality and interculturality as key practices in achieving racial justice.

The topic of mission will be an important underlying theme in the course. The discourse on race is historically connected to European colonialism and Christian missions, manifested domestically in the paternalistic treatment of Native and African Americans and globally in the colonialistic treatment of non-Western people. For this reason an important component of the quest for a Christian perspective on racial justice involves rethinking mission and the relationship between the Christian gospel and human societies and cultures.

#### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Students who complete this course will:

1. Learn the history of racism and the struggle for racial justice in American society and the Christian church.
2. Gain a working vocabulary and basic knowledge of critical race theory, intersectionality, antiracist theory and practice, and intercultural theology.
3. Become proficient in recognizing racism in Christian theology, the church, and American society.

4. Become familiar with the theological and biblical resources for addressing racism, including the resources specific to the PC(USA) and the broader Reformed tradition.
5. Acquire skills for interpreting Scripture and engaging in Christian mission in an antiracist way and developing an antiracist theology and practice.

### **M.DIV. CURRICULAR GOALS**

This course helps fulfill the following M.Div. curricular goals, enabling students to:

- Engage contemporary theological and ethical issues with insight and humility.
- Lead and nurture congregations to promote peace and justice in the public arena and encourage the witness and service of the church in mission to the world.

### **COURSE EVALUATION**

In order to receive a passing grade, students must complete the following requirements:

1. *Regular participation in weekly class discussions responding to each week's assigned readings and lecture (10%).* At least one post of at least 250 words is required in each week's discussion forum.
2. *Four reading reflection papers (40%).* Students will write four short papers (1-2 pages) over the course of the term, each reflecting on one of the assigned readings. The reflections may connect readings to other readings in the course, pose questions for further exploration, express thoughtful agreement or disagreement, or discuss how the readings relate to one's personal story. They are due by the last week of class but can be submitted anytime.
3. *Sermon or letter to the church (20%).* Students can choose between writing a sermon on the theme of racial justice or writing a letter to the church on the model of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Due at mid-semester.
4. *Final project (30%).* Students may choose between two options for their final project: (1) an 8-12 page paper exploring a topic related to Christianity and racial justice that closely engages at least two of the assigned readings, or (2) a PowerPoint video presentation on Christianity and racial justice that engages at least one of the readings and could be used in the context of an adult education class at a church.

### **TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS AND COMPUTING FACILITIES**

1. **Electronic Communication:** Students are expected to check their UD e-mail accounts regularly for course updates. Instructions for forwarding e-mail from a **dbq.edu** account can be found at the Technology Services link on the UD Web Page. Distance students will receive email accounts and University of Dubuque library access. Instructions for receiving a student technology account will be e-mailed to all distance students.

2. **Distance Students:** Visit [www.dbq.edu](http://www.dbq.edu). Choose “Technology” from the “On Campus” dropdown menu. On the right side navigation, read “Acceptable Use Policy” and “Policies and Procedures.”
3. **Tech Support:** Problems of a technical nature should be directed to the Director of Technology Services (Nicky Story, [SemTech1@dbq.edu](mailto:SemTech1@dbq.edu)), **not** the instructor.

### COURSE ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

1. **Late Policy:** This online course depends on everyone’s prompt participation in order to have meaningful dialogue, so deadlines are important. Exceptions to this policy must be approved by the instructor prior to deadlines.
2. **Plagiarism:** Definitions and consequences are stated in the current Student Handbook.
3. **Inclusive Language:** It is a course expectation that you will use inclusive language in all posts, assignments, and communications.
4. **Subject to Change Clause:** This syllabus, course calendar, and other attending materials are subject to change during the semester by the instructor, though I will only do so if absolutely necessary and will give you as clear an explanation as possible.

### GRADING SCALE

Letter grade or credit/no credit.

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	below 60

Students taking the course “pass/fail” must do passing work on all assignments.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*.

Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015.

Harvey, Jennifer. *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.

Jennings, Willie James. *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

Kendi, Ibram X. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. New York: Nation Books, 2016.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): The Book of Confessions*. Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 2016. Available online: [https://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/boc2016.pdf](https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/boc2016.pdf)

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community*. Churchwide Antiracism Policy. 2016. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/Facing-Racism-a-vision-of-intercultural-community.pdf>