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Critical Theories and the New Testament - NT622
Spring 2024
Course Description

PURPOSE:

Critical Theories (specifically Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality) have been maligned in some seminary contexts. This class is designed for mid-year to advanced students who need a solid and deeper background in the theoretical understandings of professional critical social theorists as potential lenses for performing exegesis both of New Testament texts and societal realities. We will examine critical theory, postmodernist philosophies, feminist theory, multiculturalism, queer theory, masculinity studies, cultural studies, critical race social theories, postcolonial interpretations, and womanist thought in relation to the New Testament. We will deal with the relationship between critical theory, critical social theories, and religion. We will compare critical theories, critical social theories, and their responses in the context of the current religious nationalism occurring in the Americas.

The purpose of Critical Theories and the New Testament is multivalent. First, students will be able to articulate the various meanings of theory from traditional theory, critical theory, and critical social theories such as critical race theory, postcolonial theory, intersectionality, queer theory, etc. Second, students will demonstrate a capacity to understand, interrogate, and synthesize an awareness of how critical theories may serve as a lens for reading New Testament texts. Third, self-awareness will emerge regarding identities, and communities in relationship to how reading biblical texts with critical theoretical lenses can provide language to transform society. Finally, we will ask what the church's (and minister's) role is in this transformation. Students will gain an understanding of the complexities of theological and cultural systems within the biblical text.

PREREQUISITES:

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to —

1. Describe the differences between theory, traditional theory, literary theory, critical social theory and some of its varying iterations;
2. Analyze and evaluate the critical conversations between theory and various Hebrew Bible and New Testament scholars, particularly with respect to the issues of identity and social transformation through readings of the biblical text;
3. Synthesize knowledge of a particular biblical text and the varying ways that they text can be read through the lens of a particular critical theory; and

4. Develop a maturing sense of self wherein students can engage in difficult questions regarding the biblical canon and how contemporary scholars engage the biblical text for liberation and transformation of society by synthesizing biblical studies and critical theories.

FORMAT AND CONTENT:

This class meets weekly daily from Monday July 8 to Friday July 12 from 2 pm to 5 pm.

For on-campus students, work in the course consists of classes including lectures, discussions and small group exercises, some prepared before class. Distance students will participate through Zoom either synchronously at the same time as class. Expectations for distance students will be spelled out in the syllabus.

TEXTS: Students will read 2 out of the 6 books listed in the Theory Books section below

EXPECTATIONS, ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

The expectations and assignments in this course include the following:

1. Attendance and Informed Active Participation
2. Lead Seminar on a Particular Theory
3. Annotated Bibliography for 2 out of 6 Books from the Biblical Studies and Critical Theories Book List
4. Constructive Exegetical Paper – 6-8 pages

Details for all assignments will be provided in the syllabus.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Theory Books to Choose Two From:

Delgado, Richard, Jean Stefancic, and Angela Harris. *Critical Race Theory (Third Edition): An Introduction*. New York: NYU Press, 2017. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy-s.mercer.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=e000xna&AN=1367289&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

Leela Gandhi. 2019. *Postcolonial Theory : A Critical Introduction: Second Edition*. Vol. Second edition. New York: Columbia University Press. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy-s.mercer.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=e000xna&AN=1977124&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

Gorman, Thomas J.. *Growing up Working Class : Hidden Injuries and the Development of Angry White Men and Women*, Springer International Publishing AG, 2017. ProQuest

Ebook Central,

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/merceru/detail.action?docID=4946533>.

Kirsch, Max H.. *Queer Theory and Social Change*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2001.

ProQuest Ebook Central,

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/merceru/detail.action?docID=165924>.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Intersectionality As Critical Social Theory*, Duke University Press, 2019. *ProQuest Ebook Central,*

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/merceru/detail.action?docID=5826042>.

McRuer, Robert.

Crip Theory : Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability, New York University Press, 2006. *ProQuest Ebook Central,*

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/merceru/detail.action?docID=865717>.

Kennedy, Tammie M, Joyce Irene Middleton, Krista Ratcliffe, Lilia Monzo, Peter McLaren, Annette Powell, Gregory Jay, Christine Farris, Anita M DeRouen, and M. Shane Grant.

Rhetorics of Whiteness: Postracial Hauntings in Popular Culture, Social Media, and Education. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016.

Other Biblical Studies and Critical Theories Books

Fuchs, Esther. *Feminist Theory and the Bible: Interrogating the Sources*, Lexington Books, 2016. (available on Mercer University libraries)

Anderson, Cheryl B. *Women, Ideology, and Violence Critical Theory and the Construction of Gender in the Book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomic Law*. London ;: T and T Clark International, 2004.

Conway, Colleen. *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2008. (available on Mercer University libraries)

Horrell, David G. *Ethnicity and Inclusion : Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities*. Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2020.

(available on

Mercer University libraries)

Gillian Townsley. *The Straight Mind in Corinth: Queer Readings Across 1 Corinthians 11:2–16*. SBL Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1s47637>.

Avalos, Hector, Sarah Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper. *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Parker, Angela *If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I? Black Lives Matter and Biblical Authority*

https://catalog.mercer.edu/permalink/01GALI_MUM/1qjll8d/alma991005330785505956

