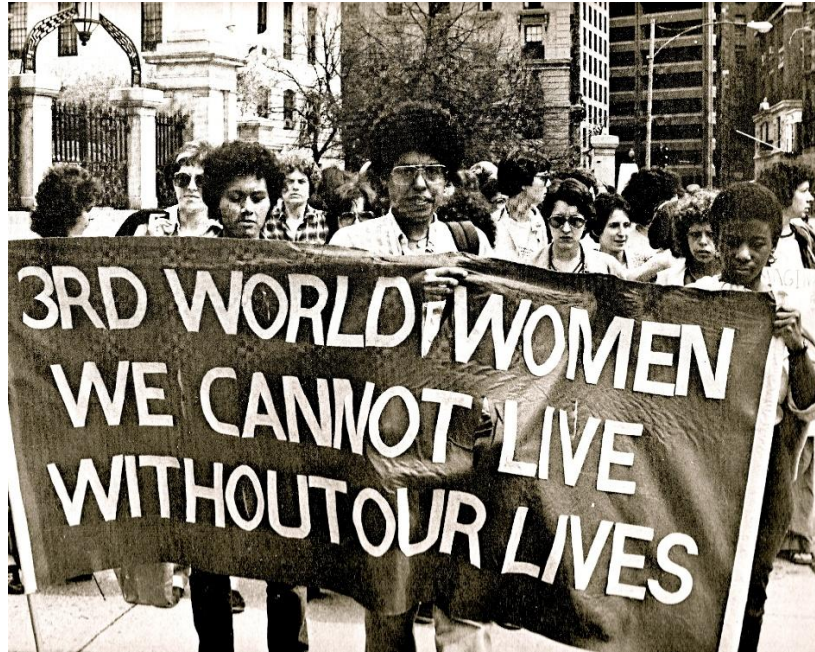




Black Feminism: A Miniseries

AN LBHS MINISERIES CRAFTED & FACILITATED
BY NATHAN LUIS CARTAGENA

Black Feminism: A Miniseries

In her influential essay “Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” (1977), Black Feminist Audre Lorde contends that “where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives.” To honor Lorde’s contention, our community is offering a four-week mini-series on Black feminism during Black History Month. Led by Wheaton College professor Dr. Nathan Luis Cartagena and meeting in St. Paul’s sanctuary from 7:00-7:50 pm after Sunday dinners, the miniseries will share and examine histories, essays, poems, and political statements by acclaimed Black Feminists. Here is the series’ trajectory:

Week 1 (Feb. 1): Discuss Katie Cannon’s history of Black women in the U.S.

Week 2 (Feb. 8): Discuss “The Combahee River Collective Statement”

Week 3 (Feb. 15): Discuss Audre Lorde’s “A Litany for Survival” & “The Uses of Anger”

Week 4 (Feb. 22): Discuss bell hooks’ essay “Theory as Liberatory Practice”

The readings will be available for free, as will questions about them that we will use for group discussion. Participants must commit to reading the texts and answering the corresponding questions about them *before* each weekly gathering (e.g., read Cannon’s chapters and answer the prepared questions about them by Feb. 1st’s meeting).

If you’re interested in participating in the Black Feminism mini-series, please fill-out the interest form in the St. Paul narthex by January 25th.

Black Feminism: A Mini-Series (Week 1)

Facilitated by Nathan Luis Cartagena, PhD

“[W]here the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives.” —Audre Lorde

Reading: Chapters 1 & 2 from Katie Cannon’s *Black Womanist Ethics* (1988)

Warnings: *The readings discuss sexual assault, sexism, racial terrorism, and economic exploitation.*

Prayer before Reading and Discussion

“For When History Misremembers,” by Cole Arthur Riley

God who reclaims,

It’s chilling to watch those in power rewrite history again and again. We are haunted by every true memory killed and buried by those would be implicated. Help us to remember that the oppressor can never be trusted as historian. Let us resist. Remind us of the power in collective memory, that our path to justice requires a fierce commitment to shared story. Reclaim the history books that contain lies and propaganda—those lessons that only serve to wash the blood from our own hands before anyone can bear witness to it. Expose the unflinching erasure of Indigenous story, of Black story, of queer story, and protect us as we try to resurrect the truth. Raise up new historians, people capable of nuance and complexity. People who refuse to look away from horror, and who document the truth even to their own detriment. We will not submit to the collective delusion that hovers around us. May collective memory get us free. May false memory die in the presence of those who remember. Amen.

Questions before Reading

1. Before participating in this month’s mini-series, have you ever belonged to a church/parish that made a sustained celebration of Black History and Black Feminism? If so, what was that community like? If not, why might that be the case?
2. Who is Katie Cannon? What do you wish that our community knew about her and her book *Black Womanist Ethics*?

Questions after Reading

1. What are your primary feelings after reading Cannon's treatment of Black women's history in the U.S.? Do these feelings surprise you? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. What are three truths from Cannon's chapters that you wish everyone in our community knew and why?
3. How have these chapters impacted your theologies of liberation and oppression?

Prayer after Reading and Discussion

"For Collective Remembrance," by Cole Arthur Riley

God who remembers,

We are grateful for all the ways this world echoes with memory—ancient etches in stone, gorges carrying the shape of water. Make us people of deep remembrance. In a world that would be content to have us forget our own names, keep them on our tongue. Keep our mother's and grandmothers' and great-grandmothers' names near to us; not that we would idealize them but that we would practice an abiding reverence for all that has formed us. Awaken our families to the necessity of story exchange. May we learn how to both recount memories and receive them with a dignity worthy of its subjects. When the familial memory is challenged, may we humble ourselves to the challenger, always being willing to turn the same memory over in a new palm; and in holding it, become more whole. When our own memory wanes, may you provide people who can carry our memories for us. Send us to the far places in ourselves, to our child selves, that we could practice compassion where it was not, kindness where it was absent, and find some manner of healing through the portal that is memory. Ase

Black Feminism: A Mini-Series (Week 2)

Facilitated by Nathan Luis Cartagena, PhD

“[W]here the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives.” —Audre Lorde

Readings: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s “Introduction” to *How We Get Free* (2017) and “The Combahee River Collective Statement” (1977)

Warnings: *The readings discuss sexual assault, sexism, racism, female sterilization, and economic exploitation.*

Prayer before Reading and Discussion

“For Solidarity,” by Cole Arthur Riley

God of Solidarity,

Thank you for being a God who enters the suffering of the world—who doesn’t run from those in pain but rushes to the site of blood and tears. Release us from those empty cravings for unity that come at no cost to the oppressor. Lead us toward spaces of costly advocacy. We confess that in speaking up on behalf of the oppressed, we too soon become enamored with the sound of our own voices. Our egos spoil even our best intentions. Show us when the voices of the vulnerable are being drowned out by the cacophony of the privileged. Make our presence and dignity known in a world that perpetually eclipses the voices of the marginalized. Guide us into a solidarity that demands something of us. Let us learn to risk ourselves on behalf of the vulnerable, believing that when one of us is harmed, we all are. And God, keep us from those who will demonize the fight in us, who would prefer us complacent and far from one another. Secure in us the courage to resist, knowing that together we will restore what the world has tried to suffocate in us. Amen.

Questions before Reading

1. Think of the communities that most shaped you before you joined our community (e.g., family, schools, churches, friendships, employers, etc.). How would they respond to learning that you’re about to read a statement written by Black Lesbian Feminists who endorse socialism? Why would these communities respond this way? What have you internalized from these communities that will impact how you read “The Combahee River Collective Statement”?
2. In the “Introduction,” Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor writes that “One could not expect Black women to be wholly active in political movements that neither represented nor advanced their interests.” Relate this point to our community: How do we represent and advance Black women’s interests? How do we fail to represent and advance these interests?

Questions after Reading

1. What are two points from Taylor's "Introduction" that you wish everyone in our community knew and why?
2. What are three points from "The Combahee River Collective Statement" that you wish everyone in our community knew and why?
3. How have these readings impacted your theology of solidarity?

Prayer after Reading and Discussion

"For Being More Than One Thing," by Cole Arthur Riley

Fluid God,

Fear can make us demand definition from mystery. We tell stories about your static nature to make the divine digestible to us. We condense and simplify our own stories to make them clear and resolved. Since we were little, we've been dissected not with nuance and complexity, but by a zeitgeist that favors categories and binaries. It feels like we must choose—to be smart or pretty, to be angry or kind, to be masculine or feminine, to be well or wounded. Free us from this confinement. Help us to remember we are not singular, that we are free to be more than one thing. Protect us from a world intent on narrowing our selfhoods. Reminds us that these binaries exist not so that we might be understood but so that we might be made small. Guide us as we honor the sacred spectrums within each of us, and within one another. There is a multitude in us all. We will not be reduced. Ase.

Black Feminism: A Mini-Series (Week 3)

Facilitated by Nathan Luis Cartagena, PhD

“[W]here the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives.” –Audre Lorde

Reading: Audre Lorde’s “The Uses of Anger” (1981) and “A Litany for Survival” (1978).

Warnings: *The readings discuss poverty, sexism, racism, and rage.*

Prayer before Reading and Discussion

“For Those Who Are Far from Their Anger,” by Cole Arthur Riley

God who burns within,

We have buried our anger in commands that you never gave it We’ve judged it as evil, willfully ignoring that our rage refracts a Maker who demonstrated an emotional anger in the prophets and an embodied anger on the day you overturned tables of injustice. We have exalted being nice and calm as a pinnacle of character, repressing that which stirs our souls so deeply we must shout. So many have wielded language of civility against the oppressed in attempts to mitigate their own discomfort and guilt. For, to face the depths of their anger is to be implicated in the systems and situations that have birthed it. Release us from the kind of niceness that only serves and protects the oppressor. And help us to also be gentle with the trauma that may have alienated us from the truth of what we feel. Awaken our collective rage in defense of dignity in the world. Provide safe friends to bear and bone the private emotions that have been silenced for so long. Together, we will no longer abandon ourselves. Make us people of holy fury. Ase.

Questions before Reading

1. What are your theologies of anger and fear? What communities, individuals, or experiences have most influenced these theologies and why?
2. Have you ever witnessed a local church manifesting holy fury? If not, why might that be? If you have, what did it look like and what did it accomplish?

Questions after Reading

1. Reread Psalms 4, 69, and 123. How do the theologies of anger in these Psalms compare to the theology of anger that Lorde champions in “The Uses of Anger”? What does our community need to know about these comparisons?
2. Lorde emphasizes the importance of using anger. Let’s apply this emphasis to our community. What are ways that we need to use anger? Where and how have we failed to accomplish this Kingdom task? How might we help each other to develop righteous anger? How might we repent for failing to be and use our anger?
3. Lorde doesn’t belittle fears caused by systemic oppression. Instead, she encourages us to see the truth that these fears highlight: Our society isn’t organized for everyone’s survival. Let’s apply this insight to our community: What do our fears reveal about how our church community is organized?

Prayer after Reading and Discussion

“For Those Whose Anxiety is a Menace,” by Cole Arthur Riley

God of sleepless nights,

How can we rest when fear has made a home in us? Our bodies are riddled with anxiety, so we eat, and look at screens, and lash out, and do a thousand unhelpful things to placate, if only for a moment, the tension rising in us. We have known and elusive anxiety—a fear that cannot be placed or rationalized. We have been tormented by our own imaginations. Protect us from being alienated by our fear and draw us into communities of patience and understanding. Steady us in your arms, God. That your presence with us would be a mother’s tenderness. That we would be rocked and swayed, but that it would be the kind of rocking that comforts us in the arms of our maker and sustainer. Let us breathe deep, keeping rhythm with the chest of God. May it be so.

Black Feminism: A Mini-Series (Week 4)

Facilitated by Nathan Luis Cartagena, PhD

“[W]here the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives.” –Audre Lorde

Reading: bell hooks’ “Theory as Liberatory Practice” (1994).

Warnings: *The reading discusses abortion, child abuse, poverty, sexism, and racism.*

Prayer before Reading and Discussion

“For Embodied Healing,” by Cole Arthur Riley

God of every ache,

Help us to befriend our bodies. We confess that it is easy to turn against them as the source of our struggle. Awaken a compassion, a tenderness, toward the parts of us that are changing, hurting—remembering that our bodies are doing everything they can to protect us, to hold back the pain and exhaustion. With every ailing and unseen thing, guide us toward those capable of listening and perceiving when we are not okay, that we wouldn’t feel pressure to pretend or apologize or explain. Remind us that we are not a burden but a beacon to those who are so poorly attuned to their own bodies and needs that they have forgotten what self-compassion looks like. Help us exist in the truth of what we need. Hold us in love as we resist the demands of this world. Amen.

Questions before Reading

1. Have you ever experienced theology as a liberatory balm to oppression that you’ve suffered? If so, what was that experience like? If not, how have you typically experienced the relationship between theology and oppression?
2. Who is bell hooks? What are three things that you wish everyone in our community knew about her?

Questions after Reading

1. Why does bell hooks reject the dichotomy between theory and practice? What bearing does this rejection have on our community's self-promotion as a community committed to "contemplation and action, worship and service, prayer and protest"?
2. bell hooks encourages us to make theory "for in its production lies the hope of our liberation, in its production lies the possibility of naming all our pain—of making all our hurt go away." Let's relate this call to our community's practices of communal theologizing. What are our community's pains? What oppressions do we suffer? What theologies do we need to make to name and heal from these evils?
3. As we end our Black Feminism mini-series, what's one thing that you've learned or experienced that you would like our community to know?

Prayer after Reading and Discussion

"For Healing from Church Abuse," by Cole Arthur Riley

Divine Shelter,

Who can we trust? The origins of so many wounds are leaders who habitually abuse their spiritual authority. Spaces that demand our fealty and faith have been breeding grounds for abuse of all kinds. Reveal their false moral superiority. Spew from the pulpit the deceptive and power-thirsty. Expose them for who and what they are. Break every false teaching and attune the spiritually vulnerable to the sound of their own voice. Lead us into new spaces of physical and spiritual safety where we can heal and connect and meet our pain and alienation with true belonging. Raise up new leaders—women, trans, queer, Black, disabled—people who understand collective power and collective liberation. May it be so.