



SAMUEL DEWITT PROCTOR CONFERENCE, INC.
"The Social Justice Network"

2019 Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference

Seminary Credit – 2019 Winter Intensive

Course: Stand Your Ground and the Justice of God

February 18 -21, 2019

Sheraton Birmingham Hotel and Conference Center- Birmingham, AL

National Memorial for Peace and Justice and Legacy Museum, Montgomery, AL

Conference Dean:

Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas

**Dean of Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary
New York, NY**

Introduction:

The aggregate expertise, research, teaching, activism, and pastoral experiences of theologians and pastors at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Pastor Conference afford an unprecedented and unique opportunity for seminarians to partake in a specially designed intensive. The 2019 conference theme and scriptures are:

Theme: *The Cry of Black Blood: The Call to Sacred Memory*

"This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Consider now! Call for the wailing women to come; send for the most skillful of them." Jeremiah 9:17 (NIV) and

"But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children..." Deuteronomy 4:9 (NRSV)

Historical Framework for the 2019 SDPC Seminarian Course

In the context of Black theology and Black faith tradition, two mighty trees have fallen. We continue to mourn the passing of the courageous father of Black Liberation Theology, Dr. James H. Cone and one of the mighty Mothers of Womanism, Dr. Katie Geneva

Cannon. We are left to gather their lessons so that we might not forget. We are left to continue to fight for our humanity, with the conviction that Father God hears our cries, Mother God walks with us and we have two new powerful ancestors for our journey during this forthcoming benchmark year called by many as the “Quad-Centennial” year.

The Quad-Centennial:

The year of 2019 commemorates 400 years since the first documented arrival of Africans who were enslaved and forced to come to North America by way of Point Comfort, Virginia. We have all been witnesses to the reinvention of the 21st Slavery Empire in North America. Black, brown and poor people continue to feel the brunt of Empire through lack of access to health care, food and water, over-policed communities, state-sanctioned violence, unemployment, xenophobia, transphobia, classism, homophobia, sexism, and racism.

- 400 years later we are still in an economic crisis in our communities;
- 400 years later we are still confronting a military industrial complex;
- 400 years later we are still seeking food justice to ensure that people have access to food, water and other basic necessities.
- 400 years later our basic human dignity and rights are being disparaged and violated from the highest offices of the U.S. presidency and his administration’s policies to the smallest hamlet where police brutality is emboldened.

Rev. Dr. James Hal Cone:

Dr. Cone was a prolific and prophetic preacher, teacher, scholar, mentor and trailblazer in his own right. As the father of Black Liberation Theology, through his written and spoken words, his work, witness and life cultivated courage for countless of other emerging Black students, scholars and theologians to personify and know the God of the oppressed, for themselves. In his latest memoir, Dr. Cone opens with this prophetic passage:

*As I come to the end of my theological journey, I can’t stop thinking about Black blood. The blood of Black people is crying out to God, and to white people, from the ground, in the United States of America. The cry of Black blood that I heard in Detroit more than 50 years ago is still crying out all over America today. White people didn’t hear it then and they still don’t hear it now, they are deaf to the cry of Black blood. Yet, black people will not be silent as our children are thrown into rivers, blown into eternity, and shot dead in the streets. Black lives matter. God hears that cry, and Black liberation theology bears witness to it. **James Hal Cone***

Dr. Cone was SDPC’s *Beautiful Are The Feet* Awardee in 2007. We are thankful to have his prophetic last written words shape our way forward.

Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon:

Dr. Cannon, the first African American woman ordained in the United Presbyterian Church and one of the Mothers of Womanist Theology and Womanist ethics, made her transition but a few months after Dr. Cone in 2018. SDPC was blessed to honor Dr. Cannon as a 2018 *Beautiful Are The Feet* Awardee. In accepting her award Dr. Cannon acknowledged her mother, who taught her about the choices of the soul:

*“To every person there openeth, a way, and ways, and a way.
And the high soul takes the high way,*

*And the low soul gropes the low,
And in between the misty flats the rest drift to and fro.
But to every person there openeth, a high way and a low,
And every person decides the way his or her soul shall go.”*
- John Oxenham

Dr. Cannon not only advised Black people of faith to “*Do the work your soul must have*”, she encouraged generations of Black women to seek the way that was opened onto them and make a decision about which way they would go. Dr. Cannon lived these very notions by realizing her call and pouring herself into her craft. As a result, we have works such as *Black Womanist Ethics* and *Katie’s Cannon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* which all contain glimmers of Dr. Cannon’s soul and are lasting pieces of her purpose work here on earth. She proclaimed that “*The cumulative effect of womanist scholarship is that it moves us toward a fundamental reconceptualization of all ethics...*” During this special time when the narrative around the “Quad-Centennial” of our people must be a time of reckoning, the ancestral power of Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon reminds us that:

“Even when people call your truth a lie, tell it anyway.”

Katie Geneva Cannon

What mighty ancestors for whom we give thanks to God!

Course Overview

Purpose and Goal of the Course:

One of the most significant flashpoints in the history of the U.S. emanated from a Birmingham jail from where the Rev. Dr. Martin L. King wrote and issued his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” in 1963. This demand and expression of hope for the Justice of God from a culture borne out of genocide and a slavocracy of peoples deemed to be “divinely less human” is as relevant today as it was then. As the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference convenes in Birmingham and takes a pilgrimage to The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, AL as acts of sacred memory and prophetic witness, we will attest to the proclamation of SDPC Dean Kelly Brown Douglas that:

“As much as black life may be circumscribed by a stand-your-ground culture, it is not defined by it. In many respects, the black prophetic tradition, especially as it is shaped by black faith, reflects the crucifixion-resurrection realities of black living. In the midst of a crucifying culture, black women and men have forged a life that defies this culture. At the same time, they have acted against this culture. In short, black life continues another history.” (Stand Your Ground, p. 220)

In the making of another history, moral memory, moral identity, moral participation and moral imagination are required to move us towards the Healing and reparatory justice – God’s justice - that people of African descent so fervently seek and deserve.

In this benchmark of history that many will commemorate as the Quad-Centennial, Dean Douglas cautions that it is not enough to create a “counternarrative to America’s narrative of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism.” We must reclaim the “signnifyin narrative” of a prophetic

tradition that speaks truth to power and “calls us to a new way of being with one another and with God.”

This class will pay special attention to the intersectionality of Black liberation and womanist theologies as a Call to Sacred Memory in response to the Cry of Black Blood. The 2019 SDPC seminarian class is blessed to have as its Dean and master teacher, Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, whose personal and intellectual engagement with our two beloved ancestors, Dr. James Hal Cone and Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon was Holy distinctive.

The purpose of this course is to explore the historical and contemporaneous importance and power of counter and signifyin narrative as tools of resistance, redemption and reparatory justice. It will reflect upon the role of memory and ancestral legacy to propel our comings and goings, our organizing and mobilizing, our lived commitments and strategies as partners in the pursuit of God’s justice on earth. This intensive will help prepare the spirits of us all to hear and receive the cries from the soil as we experience the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum.

Course Objectives

Course objectives are:

- To explore how in the midst of a stand-your-ground culture, this age of Afrophobia is ushering in a Kairos moment of resurrecting power for God’s reparatory justice.
- To explore how the cross and the lynching tree are calling us for such a time as this.
- To explore how womanist theology frees us all up to create a new global ethic.

Course Requirements Guidelines (subject to home institution superseding requirements: For 3 hours semester credit or 5 quarter hours)

1. Conference registration.
2. Pre-Conference Assignment: A 1000-word (4 pages double space) reflection paper on the readings, ranging from insights, musings, interesting quotes, concerns, to critiques.
3. Attendance and full participation at all the seminary sessions at the Conference from February 18-21, 2019.
4. Completion of one 8-10 page, double-spaced reflection paper (in conformity with home institutional requirements) reporting on how this intensive informed and supported an understanding of prophetic social justice ministry.
5. Completion of required readings.

Course registration process:

1. Students at the sponsoring seminaries and related institutions should enroll for this course at their home institution as a part of their winter 2019 schedule. **The requirements and evaluation for credit is determined by the participating Seminary in which you are enrolled.**

2. Other seminarians may select which of the sponsoring seminaries is most appropriate for enrollment and transfer of credit back to their home institution. In all cases, the course registration process and tuition costs are determined by the host seminary.
3. Continuing education units may also be available.

Seminarian Schedule:

Feb. 18, 2019 Required Seminar 9:00 am

Feb. 18, 2019 Opening Plenary 1:30 pm

Feb. 18, 2019 Evening Seminarian Activities/Debriefing 9:00pm

Feb. 18-21, 2019 Conference Sessions

**schedule subject to minor changes*

REQUIRED CORE READINGS:

Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Continuum, 2003)

Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes and Angela D. Sims, *Womanist Theological Ethics* (Westminster John Knox, 2011)

James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis, 2011)

Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Orbis, 2015)

Martin L. King, *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*, 1963

*Other Readings TBD