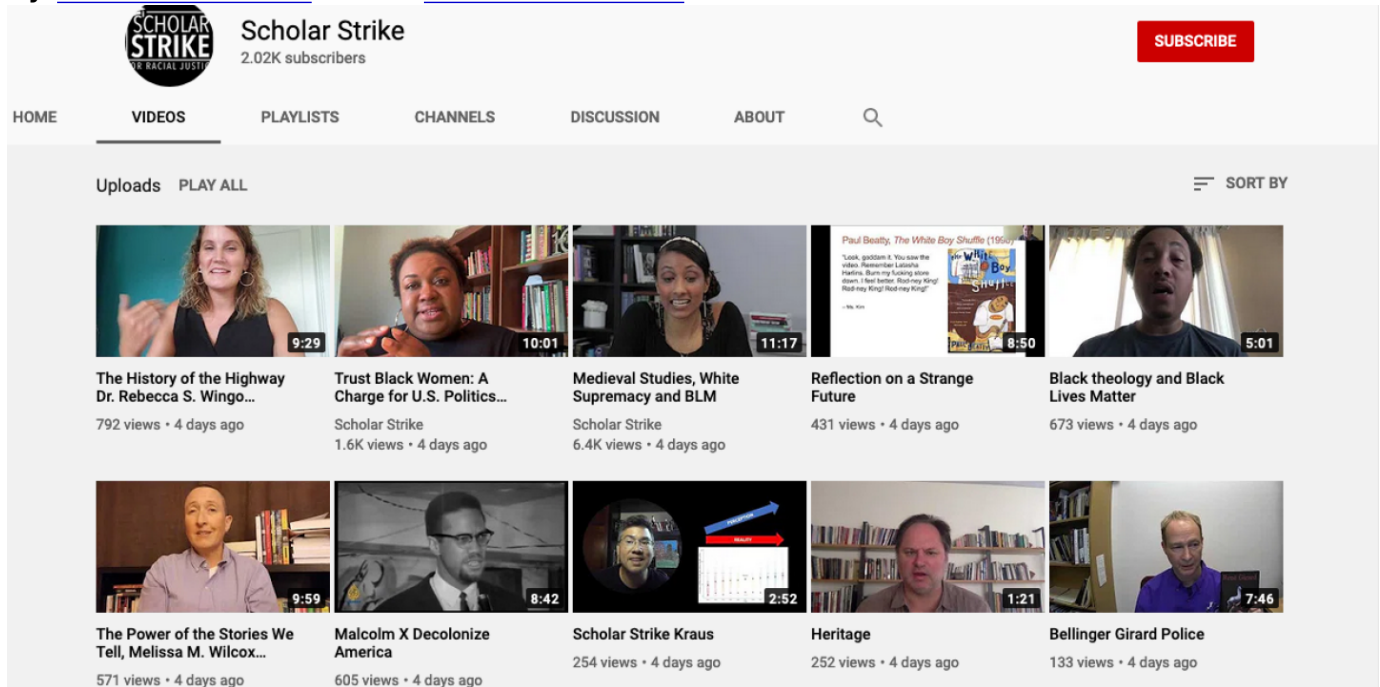


Divinity school professors among participants in 'scholar strike' for racial justice

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [October 7, 2020](#) issue



Online resources for #ScholarStrike. (Screengrab)

Anthea Butler, professor of religious studies and Africana studies at the University of Pennsylvania, said thousands of faculty supported a “scholar strike” for two days in September, during which they focused on racial injustice in or out of their classrooms.

“I would be down as a professor to follow the NBA and strike for a few days to protest police violence in America,” said Butler in an August 26 tweet. After that, Butler said, more than 5,000 faculty backed the initiative, which started on September 8.

In a blog post, Butler and co-organizer Kevin Gannon, professor of history at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa, said the initiative—reminiscent of 1960s teach-ins—is a response to the August 23 shooting of Jacob Blake, a Black man, by police in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and the killing of two demonstrators days later.

Butler said that she did not know how many religion or divinity school professors were involved but that faculty at Yale Divinity School, Vanderbilt University Divinity

School, and Brite Divinity School participated in teach-ins.

The initiative included YouTube videos that were offered as teaching resources available to professors, students, and the general public. They feature professors speaking on topics such as white supremacy, redlining, and racial disparities in the COVID-19 pandemic.

In one, Erika Gault, assistant professor of Africana studies at the University of Arizona, notes the diverse religious background of social movements, including the Black Lives Matter movement.

Other professors changed their lesson plans and taught on racial justice instead during the two-day venture. Some schools pledged to work beyond the two days and have scheduled events about white supremacy and about policing.

Vanderbilt, of which Butler is an alumna, said in a statement that it planned to host a watch party for the YouTube teach-in on its VDS Community Facebook page.

Joel Baden, professor of Hebrew Bible at Yale Divinity, tweeted on September 8, "This morning instead of our usual Bible programming, please check out and support and signal boost #ScholarStrike." He added that he would be co-teaching a seminar on "how the Bible has been used to advance racist positions (incl. slavery) and the racism and colonialism inherent in much of traditional biblical scholarship."

Wil Gafney, professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School of Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas, tweeted with the title "A Scholar Striking for Racial Justice," and listed "some black/brown scholars for you."

Top officials at Brite Divinity also issued a video and written statement about their support of the initiative.

"We write to declare our solidarity with this move, and are heartened that this action will include teach-ins by which we all can become more enlightened on what's occurring and how we might meaningfully contribute to the dynamic changes taking place in our country," the school's president and dean said in a related written statement released on September 7.

"We respect the stance of Brite faculty who might choose not to participate in this venture, with the confidence that they too pray for the time when justice will roll on like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream." —Religion News Service

