

UWM's Religious Studies Program presents:

Professor Demetrius Williams (Religious Studies and Global Studies)

Thursday, March 30, 4pm

Mitchell Hall 195



“The Cross of Christ, European Colonialism, and the Evangelization of the Enslaved”

This talk engages an ideological examination of the Cross of Christ in European colonization beginning in the middle of the fifteenth century with Prince Henry of Portugal. He is the first individual to use the theology of the cross to justify the exclusive enslavement of sub-Saharan African peoples on the claim that “Christ died to save lost souls” and while their bodies might be enslaved, their souls are redeemed. Colluding popes offered praise for Prince Henry’s voyages that traveled to “the most remote and undiscovered places... to bring into the bosom of his faith the perfidious enemies of him [Christ] and of *the life-giving Cross...*” The cross would also become the political-religious object that Europeans erected during their voyages to new and “undiscovered” regions of the world. Although the cultural and theological significance of the cross could vary between them, the one constant among the maritime European nations was the use of the cross for indicating an *intention* of establishing a claim—upon territory and human beings. In planting Christian crosses in the New World, European nations continued to flex their imperial muscles, transforming the cross of Christ in into a symbol of Christian/White supremacy. When English Protestants took their part in the transatlantic slave-trade and established colonies in North America, they would deploy the doctrine of the cross to formulate a Christology of obedience with the goal of nurturing a pedagogy of passivity among enslaved blacks. With such a doctrine they believed that they could both engage mission among the enslaved and assuage planter reluctance to their conversion, making the cross the ultimate tool of oppression.

*****Refreshments will be provided*****