

AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGIONS (RELS 270.01)
MWF 10:00 – 10:50 (ECTR 219)



CONTACT INFORMATION

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DESCRIPTION

This course will introduce students to African American religions in all their complexity and creativity. Students will explore the varieties of African American religion from the seventeenth century to the present, with special attention to the religious histories of Charleston and the Lowcountry. While much of our time will be devoted to African American Christianities, we will also explore African religions across the Atlantic as well as Islam, Catholicism, Judaism, and humanism. Throughout the semester we will discuss and debate key questions in the study of African American religion. What does Africa have to do with African American religions? Why would African American slaves become Christian and how did they transform Christianity? Were black churches catalysts or obstacles for black liberation? What is the relationship between religious and racial identity?

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Over the course of the semester, this class aims to:

- Introduce “African American religion” as a category of analysis
- Situate African American religions in their historical and cultural context
- Familiarize students with African American religion as a resource for resisting and subverting racism and white supremacy in the United States
- Hone critical reading and thinking skills through disciplined engagement with texts and constructive conversation with classmates
- Develop the ability to craft an argument by articulating a coherent thesis and defending that thesis with evidence from and analysis of primary and secondary sources

RELIGIOUS STUDIES STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (RELS-SLO)

This course satisfies two Religious Studies departmental Student Learning Outcomes:

- RELS-SLO #2: Students understand, interpret, and contextualize primary texts from one or more religious traditions.
- RELS-SLO #3: Students will demonstrate effective writing skills with the ability to craft an argument in defense of a coherent thesis statement using and analyzing supporting evidence from primary and secondary sources.

GENERAL STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course also satisfies the following General Education Student Learning Outcomes (SLO):

1. Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted and valued in various expressions of human culture
2. Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments

These two SLO will be assessed in the Final Research Paper Draft (10%)

BOOKS

Since our collective success in this class depends on careful and critical reading of all assigned materials, it is imperative that you have your own copies of all texts. I expect you to physically engage (underline arguments, star key points, write exasperated comments in the margins, et al.) the texts while reading and bring them into class to facilitate discussion. Participation points will be deducted if you fail to bring all relevant readings with you to class. Books are on reserve in the library, but to engage library copies you will need to photocopy them. If cost is a concern, see me and we can come up with creative solutions together.

Required (listed in order of assigned date):

- Eddie **Glaude**, *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2014): 978-0195182897 – PAPERBACK
- Ras Michael **Brown**, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (Cambridge, 2014): 978-1107668829 - PAPERBACK

- Arthur Huff **Fauset**, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Reprint Edition 2002): 978-0812210019 – PAPERBACK
- James **Baldwin**, *Go Tell It On the Mountain (Vintage International)* (Vintage, Reprint Edition 2013): 978-0345806543 – PAPERBACK

Recommended (listed in order of assigned date):

- Milton Sernett, ed., *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness, Second Edition* (Duke University Press, 2000): 978-0822324492 - PAPERBACK
- Sylvester Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 2015): 978-0521157001 – PAPERBACK

TECHNOLOGY

Students are expected to have a functioning CofC email address, linked to OAKS, that they check regularly. Email is my most frequent and effective means of communication.

Roughly half of our readings will be available via OAKS. When an assigned reading is posted online, students are expected to A) access the reading, B) print off their own physical copy to demonstrate active engagement with the text, and C) bring it with them to class to facilitate discussion. Participation points will be deducted if you fail to bring all relevant readings with you to class (even if they are posted online). Digital copies (on e-readers, iPhones, iPads, laptops, etc.) are not allowed without permission of the professor in advance.

Please turn your cellphones on silent when you enter the classroom. Use of cellphones in class is prohibited. You may use laptops or tablets to take notes, but not to surf the Internet (unless asked). If your use of electronic devices disrupts our classroom, I reserve the right to embarrass you publicly and/or ask you to leave.

EXPECTATIONS

For Me:

- To be passionate and prepared to lecture
- To help you understand and assess the ideas in our required reading
- To be clear and fair in communicating how your assignments will be evaluated
- To be available and accessible to answer your questions and listen to your concerns
- To be committed to facilitating discussion and fostering safe space for difficult dialogues

For You:

- To be on time, in attendance, and attentive in all class sessions
- To attend special class visits to Charleston sites reasonable distance from campus
- To engage in a research project on African American religion in the Lowcountry
- To prepare for class by reading critically and carefully *and* by bringing readings with you
- To participate in civil and constructive conversations with classmates in pairs and groups

ASSIGNMENTS

- Participation – 10%
 - I will take note of engagement in lectures and participation in conversation
 - Bringing all pertinent readings with you to class is part of participation
 - Quality (rather than quantity) of contributions will be most important
- Daily Quizzes – 30%
 - Daily multiple-choice quizzes and other alternative assignments will serve keep attendance as well as demonstrate completion and comprehension of readings
 - On special class days, one-page reflections will serve these purposes
 - I will drop your two lowest quiz grades
- Mid-semester Quiz – 20%
 - We will have a more comprehensive multiple-choice and short answer quiz in class on Friday, September 25
 - I will provide a study review guide
- Research Project – 40%
 1. Choose primary source, write two-page summary of form and content (5%)
 2. Choose three secondary sources and write four-page essay situating your source in its historical-religious context (5%)
 3. Write ten-page draft of final paper offering an interpretation of your source (10%)
 4. Revise, rewrite, and complete your final research paper (20%)

*** NOTE: All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade. Students who do not complete all assignments will receive an F. ***

ATTENDANCE AND LATE POLICIES

- You can only participate in our class if you are physically present, so attendance is essential to your success. I will take attendance via daily quizzes and/or roll call. If you miss more than six classes you will be dropped from the class.
- Class begins promptly at 10:00AM on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. I expect you to be seated and prepared to take your quiz when my iPhone strikes 10. Late arrivals will not be able to make up missed quizzes. Points will also be deducted from participation if you leave before the end of our scheduled class time (10:50AM) without advance permission from me.
- Assignments are due at the time specified on the assignment itself. Any assignment turned in after the designated deadline is considered late. You will be penalized one letter grade (10 points) for each day that your assignment is late. Days are calculated by 24-hour periods that begin with the original due date and time.
- No one is more sympathetic to the busyness of our curricular and co-curricular schedules than I am. Nevertheless, it is crucial that we all learn to plan ahead and balance our respective responsibilities. Deadlines for other classes and other prior commitments are not acceptable excuses for missed class or late work.
- The same goes for technological problems. We are increasingly dependent on our devices and other technologies. However, as I know you know, technology can fail us. Computers crash, iPads break, servers are sometimes down, etc. Again, though I am

sympathetic, technical difficulties are not acceptable excuses for late assignments or missed class. I expect you to complete assignments well enough in advance to factor in these variables and remember, always (ALWAYS!) back up your documents!!!

HONOR CODE

The College of Charleston honor code will be strictly enforced in this course. Learning to read critically, think independently, and speak and write effectively in your own voice is at the heart of a liberal arts education. I encourage you to continue class conversations outside the classroom, to discuss readings with your fellow classmates, and even to study together. However, you should not collaborate with another student on any assignment that you hand in for credit, whether it is an in-class quiz or an out-of-class paper. Moreover, you should never use words or make arguments that are not your own without proper attribution, regardless of whether they are the words or arguments of fellow classmates, books, articles, blog posts, et al.

All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the College. If you are caught taking credit for work that is not your own or cheating in any other way, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment and I will file an Honor Code Report with the College.

The honor code and the consequences for academic dishonesty can be viewed at:
<http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/>.

DISABILITY ACCOMODATION

If you have, or think you may have, a documented disability (physical, learning, psychiatric, visual, hearing, etc.) please visit the Center for Disability Services. The Center can provide you with the information and documentation necessary to arrange accommodations you may require.

The Center for Disability Services / Students Needing Access Parity (SNAP) can be accessed via: <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/>.



CLASS SCHEDULE (subject to change with advance notice)

*** NOTE: We have a few “Special Classes” that meet outside our regular classroom location. I recommend you put them in your calendar now and plan accordingly. ***

What is “religion” and what is “African American religion”?

- Wednesday, August 26: Introductions
- Friday: Nongbri, Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (OAKS)
- Monday, August 31: **Glaude**, Chapters 1 and 2
- Wednesday: **Glaude**, Chapters 3, 4, and 5
- Friday: **Glaude**, Chapters 6, 7, and Conclusion

Religions across the Black Atlantic

- Monday, September 7: Special Class: Old Slave Mart Museum (meet at 6 Chalmers St)
Brown, Prologue, Chapters 1 and 2
- Wednesday: **Brown**, Chapter 3
- * Extra Credit Opportunity: “Teach-in on Police Brutality,”
Thursday, September 10 at 7:00 pm in Robert Scott Small 235 ***
- Friday: Equiano, “Traditional Ibo Religion and Culture” (OAKS)
- Monday, September 14: Watch *This Far By Faith*, “There is a River”
- Wednesday: **Brown**, Chapter 4
- Friday: **Brown**, Chapters 5 and Epilogue
- Monday, September 21: Special Class: Avery Research Center (meet at 125 Bull St)
- Wednesday: Le Jau, “Slave Conversion on the Carolina Frontier” (OAKS)
- Friday: ***Mid-Semester Quiz***

Religion in Slavery and Slave Religion

- Monday, September 28: Du Bois, “Of the Faith of the Fathers” (OAKS)

Wednesday: NO CLASS: RESEARCH DAY

Friday: *CLASS CANCELED – WEATHER*

Monday, October 5: *CLASS CANCELED – WEATHER*

*** Extra Credit Opportunity: *12 Years A Slave* film viewing,
Monday, October 5 at 7:00 pm in Education Center 116 ***

Wednesday: Baptist, “Breath” (OAKS)
Consult with me on your Primary Source (Office Hours)

Friday: Walker, “Our Wretchedness in Consequence of the Preachers of Religion” and Stewart, “Mrs. Stewart’s Farewell Address to Her Friends in Boston” (OAKS)

Monday, October 12: *No reading, no quiz*

Wednesday: Allen, “Life Experience and Gospel Labors” and Lee, “A Female Preacher among the African Methodists” (OAKS)

Friday: Start reading **Baldwin**, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*
First Research Project Assignment Due



***** Sunday, October 18 – Tuesday October 20 – FALL BREAK *****

Wednesday, October 21: *No quiz*
Baldwin, continue reading

Friday: Higginbotham, “The Black Church: A Gender Perspective”

(OAKS)
Baldwin, continue reading

*****Midterm Grades Due*****

The Great Migrations and African American Religion

Monday, October 26: Drake and Cayton, “The Churches of Bronzeville” (OAKS)
Baldwin, continue reading

Wednesday: *No quiz*
Baldwin, continue reading

Friday: **Baldwin**, finish reading and discuss

Monday, November 2: *No quiz*
Fauset, Foreword, Introduction, Author’s Note

Wednesday: **Fauset**, Chapters 1, 4, and 5

Friday: **Fauset**, Chapters 7, 8, 11 – discuss entire book



From Civil Rights to Black Power to #BlackLivesMatter

Monday, November 9: ***Second Research Project Assignment Due***
No reading, no quiz

Wednesday: McFadden, “Septima P. Clark and the Struggle for Human Rights” (OAKS)

Friday: King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (OAKS)

Monday, November 16: Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet?":
<http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/mx.html>

***** Course-Instructor Evaluations Open*****

Wednesday: Griffin, "'Ironies of the Saint': Malcolm X, Black Women, and the Price of Protection" (OAKS)

Friday: *No reading, no quiz*

Monday, November 23: NO CLASS (AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION)

Wednesday, November 25: ***Third Research Project Assignment Due***

***** Wednesday, November 25 – Sunday, November 29 – THANKSGIVING BREAK *****



Monday, November 30: Cone, "Black Theology and the Black Church: Where Do We Go From Here?" (OAKS)

Wednesday: Douglas, "Womanist Theology: What is its Relationship to Black Theology?" (OAKS)

*** Extra Credit Opportunity: *Boyz n the Hood* film viewing
Wednesday, December 2 at 7:00 pm in Education Center 116 ***

Friday: Rev. Sekou, “Every Day is Good Friday in America”: <http://forusa.org/blogs/osagyefo-uhuru-sekou/good-friday-america/13177>
Rev. Sekou, “The Liberation Theology of Ferguson”: <https://vimeo.com/125610838>

Monday, December 7: Rafiel Tessfamariam, “How Black Activism Lost Its Religion”
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-black-activism-lost-its-religion/2015/09/18/2f56fc00-5d6b-11e5-8e9e-dce8a2a2a679_story.html

Tuesday: Class Make-up Day

***** Wednesday, December 9 – Wednesday, December 16 – FINALS WEEK *****

Monday, December 14: Fourth and Final Research Project Assignment Due

***** Wednesday, December 16: Course-Instructor Evaluations Close at Midnight *****