African American Religion
RELS 270 | TR 1:40-2:55PM | ECTR 219

Contact
Professor: Dr. Matthew J. Cressler
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Course 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
• To cultivate critical thinking, reading, and writing skills
• To introduce “African American religion” as a category of analysis
• To practice crafting coherent and compelling evidence-based arguments
• To situate African American religions in their historical and cultural context

General Education Student Learning Outcomes (Humanities)
• Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.
• Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the humanities area under study and interpret the material in writing assignments.
These outcomes will be assessed in the Final Paper.

Departmental Student Learning Outcomes (Religious Studies)
• Students understand, interpret, and contextualize primary texts from one or more religious traditions
• Students demonstrate effective writing skills with the ability to craft a persuasive argument in defense of a coherent thesis statement using and analyzing supporting evidence from primary and secondary sources

Course Assignments and Assessment
• Participation (20%)
  o I take attendance daily.
  o You cannot participate if you are not present.
  o Quality counts more than quantity, but you must speak to contribute.
  o If you miss more than FIVE classes, you will be dropped from this course.
• Book Exam: In Class on Thursday, September 21 (15%)
• Reading Responses (2-pages, double-spaced): (Three Total, Worth 5% Each)
• Choose-Your-Own-Adventure Research Project (Worth 50% Total)
  o Choose Your Method: Meet with Me by Thursday, September 21 (5%)
  o Choose Your Subject (Community or Artifact): Due by Thursday, October 12 (5%)
  o Annotated Bibliography: Due by Thursday, November 2 (10%)
  o Draft Thesis and Introductory Paragraph: Due by Thursday, November 16 (5%)
  o Presentations: In Class on Tuesday and Thursday, November 28 and 30 (5%)
  o Final Paper: Due Thursday, December 7 (20%)

Extra Credit
• The African American Studies Film Festival and Albert Raboteau’s invited lectures at Circular Church (all already included in the syllabus) are your primary extra credit opportunities. In order to receive credit, you must attend the events and write a viewing response (1-page, double-spaced, 12-point font, akin to reading response papers). Your response is due via email within one week of said event.
Course Materials
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 physical copies of all texts. I expect you to actively engage the texts (underline arguments, star key points, write exasperated comments in the margins, etc.) while reading outside of class and to bring them with you to class to facilitate discussion. Don’t worry, we will practice this together in class!

There are three required books. If you buy the book somewhere other than the CofC Bookstore, please make sure you are buying the correct edition. All other readings will be in your Reader. Here’s how you make your Reader in three easy steps! Step 1: buy a three-ring binder. Step 2: print off the Reader (found in OAKS under COURSE RESOURCES). Step 3: place the Reader in your binder and bring to class when assigned. 😊 If a reading is listed as “In Class” on the syllabus, you need not read it ahead of time but you still must bring the book with you to class. Otherwise, each reading is due on the day it is assigned.

You will receive a 0 for attendance if you fail to bring assigned material on any given class day. Digital copies are prohibited without permission of professor (see Technology policy below).

✔ Three-ring Binder

Expectations

▪ For Your Professor
  ○
  ○
  ○

▪ For Yourself
  ○
  ○
  ○

▪ For Each Other
  ○
  ○
  ○

Attendance and Late Policies

▪ You can only participate in our class if you are physically present, so attendance is essential to success. I will take attendance daily. If you miss more than FIVE classes you
will fail and be dropped from the class.

- Class begins promptly at 1:40PM on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I expect you to be seated and prepared for class when the proverbial iPhone strikes 1:40. Points will be deducted if you arrive late or if you leave before the end of our scheduled class time (2:55PM).
- 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 (I have a wife, almost three daughters, and a dog, after all). 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!!!

**Technology**

Students are expected to have a CofC email address linked to OAKS that they check regularly. Email is my most frequent and effective means of communication. (Seriously, tho. Check it!)

Please turn your cellphones on silent when you enter the classroom. Use of cellphones in class is strictly prohibited and will result in a 0 for attendance.

I prefer that you use paper and pen/cil as your note-taking devices (crayons and markers also acceptable). If you prefer to take notes on a laptop or tablet, I ask that you sign an agreement with me for responsible use and that you sit in the rear of the classroom, so as not to distract your classmates. If your use of devices disrupts our class, I reserve the right to embarrass you and/or ask you to leave. (Please see me if and when you wish to sign an agreement.)

**Disability Accommodation**

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/](http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/).

**Religious Accommodation**

The College acknowledges that religious practices differ from tradition to tradition and that the demands of religious observance in some traditions may cause conflicts with student schedules. In affirming this diversity, the College supports the concept of “reasonable accommodation for
religious observance” in regard to class attendance, and the scheduling of examinations and other academic work requirements, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship on the College. Our full Statement on Religious Accommodations Policy can be found here: http://president.cofc.edu/community-relations/rlc/accommodation.php

The Center for Student Learning
The CSL, located on the first floor of the library, offers a wide variety of tutoring and other academic resources that support many courses offered at the College. Services include walk-in tutoring, by appointment tutoring, study strategies appointments, Peer Academic Coaching (PAC), and Supplemental Instruction (SI). All services are described and all lab schedules are posted on the CSL website: http://csl.cofc.edu/.

Writing Lab
I encourage you to take advantage of the Writing Lab in the Center for Student Learning (Addlestone Library, first floor). Trained writing consultants can help with writing for all courses; they offer one-to-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. For more, visit http://csl.cofc.edu/labs/writing-lab/.

Honor Code and Academic Integrity
Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student’s actions are related more to a misunderstanding will be handled by the instructor. A written intervention designed to help prevent the student from repeating the error will be given to the student. The intervention, submitted by form and signed both by the instructor and the student, will be forwarded to the Dean of Students and placed in the student’s file.

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This grade will appear on the student’s transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent. The student may also be placed on disciplinary probation, suspended (temporary removal) or expelled (permanent removal) from the College by the Honor Board.

Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration—working together without permission—is a form of cheating. Unless the instructor specifies that students can work together on an assignment, quiz and/or test, no collaboration during the completion of the assignment is permitted. Other forms of cheating include possessing or using an unauthorized study aid (which could include accessing information via a cell phone or computer), copying from others’ exams, fabricating data, and giving unauthorized assistance. Research conducted and/or papers written for other classes cannot be used in whole or in part for any assignment in this class without obtaining prior permission from the instructor.
Course Schedule (subject to change with advance notice)

A Very Short Introduction to African American Religion

Week 1 – August 22
Tuesday: Who are we?
   Syllabus
Thursday: What is this class?
   Obama, “Eulogy for the Hon. Rev. Clementa Pinckney” (OAKS)
   In Class: Douglass, “Slaveholding Religion and the Christianity of Christ”
   (Sernett: pp. 102-111)

Monday, August 28: Last Day of Drop/Add

Week 2 – August 29
Tuesday: The category of “African American religion”
   Glaude, Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-31)
Thursday: African American Christianity, Part 1
   Glaude, Chapters 3-4 (pp. 32-64)
   In Class: Le Jau, “Slave Conversion on the Carolina Frontier” (Sernett: pp. 25-33)

Week 3 – September 5
Tuesday: African American Christianity, Part 2
   Glaude, Chapters 5-6 (pp. 65-95)
   In Class: Lee, “A Female Preacher among the African Methodists”
   (Sernett: pp. 164-184)

Wednesday, September 6 at 7:00 p.m. at Circular Congregational Church

Thursday: Visit Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church
   (Meet at 5 Glebe St. at 1:40PM)

Thursday, September 7 at 7:00 p.m. at Circular Congregational Church

Week 4 – September 12
Tuesday: African American Islam
   Glaude, Chapter 7 and Conclusion (pp. 96-118)
   In Class: W. Muhammad, “Self-Government in the New World”
(Sernett: 499-507)
Thursday: Visit to the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture
(Meet at 125 Bull St at 1:45PM)

Africa, America, and the Making of African American Religion

Week 5 – September 19
Tuesday: Enslaved Africans in the Americas
Whitehead, excerpt from The Underground Railroad (Reader)
Equiano, “Traditional Ibo Religion and Culture” (Sernett: 13-19)
Thursday: Book Exam

Sunday, September 24: D-DAY!!!

Week 6 – September 26
Tuesday: Julie Dash, Daughters of the Dust (1991)
Bambara, “Preface” in Daughters of the Dust compendium (Reader)
Thursday: Julie Dash, Daughters of the Dust (1991)
hooks and Dash, “Dialogue” in Daughters of the Dust compendium (Reader)

Week 7 – October 3
Tuesday: “Magic” and “religion” in America
Chireau, “Introduction” from Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition (Reader)
In Class: Bibb, “Conjuration and Witchcraft (Sernett: 76-80)
Thursday: What does Africa have to do with African America?
Brown, “Place, Culture, and Power” from African-Atlantic Cultures and the South
Carolina Lowcountry (Reader)

Monday, October 9: AAST Film Fest: Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner

**African American Religion and the Black Freedom Struggles**

Week 8 – October 10

Tuesday: Living Jim Crow

Wright, “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow” (Reader)

Thursday: African American religion one hundred years after Emancipation

Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook” in The Fire Next Time (pp. 1-10)

Monday – Tuesday, October 16-17: Fall Break

Week 9 – October 19

Thursday: “...No more water, the fire next time!”

Baldwin, “Down at the Cross” in The Fire Next Time (pp. 11-106)

Friday, October 20: Midterm Grades due

Monday, October 23: AAST Film Fest: Night of the Living Dead

Week 10 – October 24

Tuesday: The origins of the civil rights movement

Rouse, “We Seek to Know...in Order to Speak the Truth” (Reader)

Thursday: Class Research Day in Addlestone Library

Thursday, October 26: Last day to Withdraw (with “W”)

Monday, October 30: AAST Film Fest: Get Out

Week 11 – October 31

Tuesday: The religious roots of Black Power

E. Muhammad, “What the Muslims Want, What the Muslims Believe” (Reader)

In Class: Malcolm X, “God’s Judgment of White America”

Thursday: African American religion and the Black Power revolution

Cressler, “Black Catholics and Black Power” (Reader)

Monday, November 6: AAST Film Fest: I Am Not Your Negro

**African American Religion in the Age of #BlackLivesMatter**

Week 12 – November 7

Tuesday: The Black Church is dead

Glaude, “The Black Church is Dead” (Reader)

Glaude and co., “Responses: The Black Church Is Dead—Long Live the Black Church” (Reader)
Thursday: Is the Black Church dead?
Sekou, “The Clergy’s Place is with the Protestors in Ferguson” (Reader)
Tesfamariam, “Why the Modern Civil Rights Movement Keeps Religious Leaders at Arms Length” (Reader)

Week 13 – November 14
Tuesday: Hip Hop and African American religion
Best, “Gospel According to...” (Reader)
Kanye West, “Jesus Walks” (OAKS)
Thursday: Hip Hop as African American religion?
Chance the Rapper, Coloring Book (OAKS)

Week 14 – No Class

Friday – Tuesday, November 17-21: American Academy of Religion
Wednesday – Sunday, November 22-26: Thanksgiving Break

Week 15 – November 28
Tuesday: Presentations on African American religion in Charleston
Thursday: Presentations on African American religion in Charleston

Monday, December 4: Last day of Classes

Friday, December 15: Final Grades Due