RELIGION AND SOCIETY:
BLACK NATIONALISM AND RELIGION (RELS 115.01)
MWF 01:00 - 01:50 (ECTR 103)

CONTACT INFORMATION
Professor: Matthew J. Cressler, Ph.D.
Office: 4C Glebe Street, Room 105
Hours: MW 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. (or by appointment)
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DESCRIPTION
This course will introduce students to religious ideas and practices from across the African diaspora that gave rise to the African American political tradition known as “black nationalism.” In popular American memory black nationalists—whose philosophies and tactics range from cultural pride to armed self-defense, from economic self-determination to political independence—are usually associated with “Black Power” and imagined as the secular alternative to religious civil rights activists. This course challenges this image and situates Black Power in the long black nationalist tradition, a tradition with deep religious roots. Students will be introduced to the concept of “nationalism” and its relationship with its modern conceptual counterpart “religion.”
OBJECTIVES
Over the course of the semester, this class aims to:

- Introduce “religion” and “nationalism” as categories of analysis
- Situate black nationalism in its historical and cultural context
- Familiarize students with black nationalist critiques of racism and white supremacy in the United States and provide tools to assess black nationalism as a religio-political tradition
- 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 Third Critical Analysis Essay (20%)

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):

- **David Walker’s Appeal** (Hill and Wang, Revised Edition 1995): 978-0809015818 - PAPERBACK

**Recommended (listed in order of assigned date):**


**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 comprehend 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 write three critical analyses of black nationalism and religion
• 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%
  o I will take daily note of engagement in lectures and participation in conversation
  o Bringing all pertinent readings with you to class is part of participation
  o Quality (rather than quantity) of contributions will be most important
- Daily Quizzes – 30%
  o Daily multiple-choice quizzes will serve keep attendance and demonstrate completion and comprehension of readings
  o On special class days, one-page reflections will serve these purposes
  o I will drop the two lowest grades
- Mid-semester Quiz – 20%
  o We will have a more comprehensive multiple-choice and short answer quiz in class on Friday, September 25
  o I will provide a study review guide
- Critical Analysis Essays (4-5 pages each) – 40%
  1. Critical Analysis of David Walker’s Appeal (10%)
  2. Critical Analysis of Essien-Udom’s Black Nationalism (10%)
  3. Critical Analysis of Your Source (20%)
     ▪ Identify Your Source in Consultation with Me by October 16
     ▪ Articulate Thesis and Provide Preliminary Outline by November 20
     ▪ Third and Final Critical Analysis Essay due Finals Week

*** 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 either 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 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 a “nation”?**

**Wednesday, August 26:** Introductions

**Friday:** Nongbri, “Introduction” and “What Do We Mean by ‘Religion’?” (OAKS)

**Monday, August 31:** Renan, “What is a Nation?” (OAKS)

**Wednesday:** Goldschmidt, “Introduction: Race, Nation, and Religion” (OAKS)

**Friday:** *Declaration of Independence:*
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

*Constitution of the United States:*
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html (focus attention on Preamble; Article I, Sections 2 and 9; Article IV, Section 2)

**Becoming a Black Nation**

**Monday, September 7:** Jefferson, selection from *Notes on the State of Virginia* (OAKS)
Baptist, selection from *The Half Has Never Been Told* (OAKS)

**Wednesday:** Special Class: Old Slave Mart Museum (meet at 6 Chalmers St)

* Extra Credit Opportunity: “Teach-in on Police Brutality,”
Thursday, September 10 at 7:00 pm in Robert Scott Small 235 *

**Friday:** Watch *This Far By Faith*, “There is a River”
Start reading Stuckey, “Slavery and the Circle of Culture” (OAKS)

**Monday, September 14:** Watch *This Far By Faith*, “God is a Negro”
Continue reading Stuckey, “Slavery and the Circle of Culture”

**Wednesday:** Continue reading Stuckey, “Slavery and the Circle of Culture”

**Friday:** Discuss Stuckey, “Slavery and the Circle of Culture” (OAKS)
Start reading *Walker’s Appeal*

**Monday, September 21:** Special Class: Emanuel A.M.E. Church (meet at 110 Calhoun St)
Cressler, “Why White Terrorists Attack Black Churches”: http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2015/06/charleston_ame_church_shooting_dylann_roof_is_the_latest_in_a_long_line.html

Wednesday: Continue reading *Walker’s Appeal*

Friday: *Mid-Semester Quiz*
Continue reading *Walker’s Appeal*

Monday, September 28: Discuss *Walker’s Appeal*

* Extra Credit Opportunity: *Do The Right Thing* film viewing
Monday, September 28 at 7:00 pm in Education Center 116 *

Wednesday: Special Class: Addlestone Library (122 Addlestone)

Friday: NO CLASS: *First Critical Analysis Essay Due*

**Black Nationalism**

Monday, October 5: Delaney, “The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States (OAKS)

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

Wednesday: Blyden, “The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America” (OAKS)
Friday: Garvey, “Address at Newport News”
Universal Negro Improvement Association, “Declaration of the
Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World”

Monday, October 12: Start reading **Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism**
Hoover, “Federal Surveillance of ‘Negro Agitators’”

Wednesday: Continue reading **Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism**
Johnson, “Garveyism, Anticolonialism, and State Repression of
Black Religions” (OAKS)

Friday: Continue reading **Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism**
*Identify Your Source in Consultation with Me*

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

Wednesday, October 21: Continue reading **Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism**

Friday: Discuss **Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism**

***Midterm Grades Due***

**Debating Black Nationalism, Black Power, and Religion**

Monday, October 26: Selection, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley* (OAKS)

Wednesday: Watch *Malcolm X* (1972)

Friday: Finish watching and discuss *Malcolm X*
*Second Critical Analysis Essay Due*

Monday, November 2: Griffin, “‘Ironies of the Saint’: Malcolm X, Black Women, and the
Price of Protection” (OAKS)

Wednesday: Marsh, “Cleveland Sellers and the River of No Return” (OAKS)

Friday: King, selection from *Where Do We Go From Here?* (OAKS)

Monday, November 9: Start reading **Cone, Martin and Malcolm and America**

Wednesday: Continue reading **Cone, Martin and Malcolm and America**
Cleage, “The Black Messiah and the Black Revolution” (OAKS)
Friday: Continue reading *Cone, Martin and Malcolm and America*

Monday, November 16: Continue reading *Cone, Martin and Malcolm and America*  
Williams, “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Voices,”  
(OAKS)  
Douglas, “Womanist Theology: What is its Relationship to Black Theology?” (OAKS)

*** Course-Instructor Evaluations Open***

Wednesday: Continue reading *Cone, Martin and Malcolm and America*

Friday: Finish and discuss *Cone, Martin and Malcolm and America*  
*Articulate Your Thesis and Provide Preliminary Outline*

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

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

**The Religious Roots of the Black Lives Matter Movement**

Monday, November 30: Douglas, selection from *Stand Your Ground* (OAKS)

Wednesday: Newsome, “Now is the Time for True Courage”:  
Coates, “Letter to My Son”:  

Friday: Johnson, “Black Religion, the Security State, and the Racialization of Islam” (OAKS)

Monday, December 7: Sekou, “Every Day is Good Friday in America”:  
Sekou, “The Liberation Theology of Ferguson”:  
[https://vimeo.com/125610838](https://vimeo.com/125610838)

Tuesday: READING DAY
*** Wednesday, December 9 – Wednesday, December 16 – FINALS WEEK ***

*Wednesday, December 9: Third and Final Critical Analysis Essay Due*

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