COLONIALISM, FREEDOM, AND AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGIONS
(RELS 370: Adv. Topics in American Religion)
TR 10:50AM-12:05PM (MYBK 119)

Ieshia Evans arrested by Baton Rouge police in #BlackLivesMatter protest (Photo by Jon Bachman, 2016)

CONTACT
Professor: Dr. Matthew J. Cressler
Office: 4C Glebe Street, Room 105
Hours: W 11:00AM-12:30PM, R 3:00PM-4:30PM
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DESCRIPTION
Freedom is an ironic idea in African American religious history. African American Studies scholar Eddie Glaude defines the category "African American religion" as a practice of freedom in the midst of white supremacy. At the same time, the very concept of freedom was forged in an age of empires, colonial conquest, and transatlantic slavery. What is “freedom” and how is it connected to colonialism? What can the study of African American religions teach us about freedom struggles in the past and in the present? This upper-level seminar will explore these questions (and more) through close readings of primary sources and contemporary scholarship at the intersection of African American Studies and Religious Studies. The course will cover an array of religions across the African diaspora ranging from Yoruba traditions, Voudou, and conjure to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.
OBJECTIVES
1) Introduce “religion” and “race” as modern constructed categories
2) Interrogate the relationship between “freedom” and “colonialism”
3) Situate African American religions and freedom struggles in the context of colonialism
4) Engage and imagine possible worlds beyond the confines of present circumstances
5) Hone your critical reading, thinking, and writing skills through disciplined engagement with texts, constructive conversation with classmates, and creative/writing projects

EVALUATION
20% Attendance and Participation
   • This is a seminar and, as such, most of our time will be spent in discussion.
   • If you are worried about participation, meet with me (ASAP) to strategize.
   • Quality counts more than quantity, but you must speak to contribute.
   • You cannot participate if you are not present.
10% Discussion Board
   • You will post on our OAKS discussion board by 11:59PM prior to each class.
   • Your post should do two things:
     1. Rearticulate the reading’s most important point in your own words.
     2. Pose a question raised by the reading for further discussion in class.
   • Your posts will be graded on the following scale:
     ✓ (100%)
     ✓ - (75%)
     (0%)
   • Please read your peers’ posts in preparation for class.
10% Discussion Leaders
   • Each of you will be assigned to a small group.
   • Your small group will lead one class discussion on JOHNSON.
   • You will meet with me the preceding week to prepare your discussion.
10% Critical Analysis Essay
   • You will write a 4-5 page (double-spaced, 12-point font) essay that analyzes a primary source in light of its corresponding chapter in JOHNSON.
   • Your essay will be due on the day assigned to your small group.
10% Field Trip Essay
   • You will write a 4-5 page (double-spaced, 12-point font) essay analyzing your own experiences at Oyotunji African Village in light of our course.
   • It is due one week after our trip to Oyotunji.
30% Freedom Dreaming Un/Essay: your final assignment will be to either write an essay (8-10 pages) or create an unessay (project + 4-5 page creator’s statement) that places an artist or activist in dialogue with the questions and themes of the course.
   • Meet with me to your subject (5%) by Tuesday, February 27.
   • Submit your un/essay proposal (5%) by Tuesday, April 3.
   • Your final project (20%) is due by Tuesday, May 1.
Extra Credit

- To receive extra credit you may attend a specified extra credit event. Specified events are indicated in the syllabus by the acronym EC. In order to receive credit, you must attend said event and write a short paper reflecting on it (1-page, double-spaced, 12-point font). Your reflection is due via email within one week of said event.

GRADING SCALE

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REQUIRED

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.

There are four required books and one required musical recording. All the books are available from the CoC Bookstore. As long as you’re able to listen to Hamilton in its entirety, I do not mind what medium you use. All other readings will be posted our OAKS site (under Content). Please print them and bring hard copies with you to class when necessary. You will receive a 0 for attendance if you fail to bring your assigned material on any given class day. Digital copies are prohibited without permission of professor (see Technology policy below). Books are on reserve in the library, but to actively engage library copies you will need to photocopy them. If cost is a concern, please see me.

- Ta-Nehisi Coates & Brian Stelfreeze, BLACK PANTHER: A Nation Under Our Feet, Books 1-3 (Marvel Comics, 2016-2017)
- Lin-Manuel Miranda, HAMILTON: An American Musical (Original Cast Recording)

RECOMMENDED

Since this is an advanced topics course, I encourage you to read beyond what is required of you. To that end, I have listed three books as recommended. Glaude is highly recommended for students who have not already taken RELS 270: African American Religion. We will read excerpts of both Kelley and Taylor this semester, but the entire books are worth reading.

- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, From #BlackLivesMatter To Black Liberation (2016)
EXPECTATIONS (we will craft these in class together)

For Me:
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For You:
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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 10:50AM on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I expect you to be seated and prepared for class when the proverbial iPhone strikes 10:50. Points will be deducted if you arrive late or leave before the end of class.
• 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, three daughters, 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, while I’m 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.

Please turn your cellphones on silent when you enter the classroom. Use of cellphones 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. (See me if 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/.

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.

Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the Student
COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change with advance notice)

INTRODUCTION
Week 1 – What is this course?
Tuesday, January 9
Thursday, January 11
   JOHNSON, Introduction and Conclusion (14 pp.)

Week 2 – “Freedom” and Freedom
Monday, January 15: Martin Luther King Day
   Sekou, “Martin Luther King’s Radical Legacy” – OAKS
Tuesday, January 16
   Patterson, “Freedom, Slavery, and the Modern Construction of Rights” (36 pp.)
Thursday, January 18
   Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” (4 pp.) – OAKS
   Kelley, “When History Sleeps: A New Beginning” (12 pp.) – OAKS
EC: Thursday, January 18 @ 6PM: Dr. Shari Rabin and Dr. Matthew Cressler, “Frontier Jews and Black Catholics: New Books in American Religion” (Arnold Hall, JWST)

(FUN) FREEDOM
Week 3 – Race, Religion, and Colonialism
Tuesday, January 23
   West, “Ignoble Paradox of Modernity” (4 pp.) – OAKS
   Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk” (16 pp.) – OAKS
Thursday, January 25
   Baldwin, “White Racism or World Community?” (7 pp.) – OAKS
EC: Thursday, January 25 @ 6PM: Dr. Clifton Granby, “Resilient Injustices, Unyielding Resolve” (Randolph Hall – Alumni Memorial Hall)

Week 4 – Colonial Governance and Religious Subjectivity
Tuesday, January 30
   JOHNSON, Chapter 3 (49 pp.)
Thursday, February 1
   Equiano, “Traditional Ibo Religion” (6 pp.) – OAKS
EC: Thursday, February 1 at 6:30PM – “The First 365: Analyzing the First Year of the Trump Administration,” moderated by MSNBC’s JoyAnn Reid

Week 5 – Democracy and Myth
Tuesday, February 6
   HAMILTON
   Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story” (VIDEO) – OAKS
Thursday, February 8
   Monteiro, “Race-Conscious Casting & the Erasure of the Black Past” (10 pp.) – OAKS
   Responses to Monteiro’s “Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda’s Hamilton” – OAKS
FREEDOM STRUGGLES
Week 6 – White Revolution and Black Settler Colonialism
Tuesday, February 13
Johnson, Chapter 4 (49 pp.)
Group #1: Discussion Leaders
Thursday, February 15
VISIT: Avery Center in Exile (Addlestone Library, Rm. 360)

FIELD TRIP: Ryan Coogler’s Black Panther (2018)

Week 7 – Black Theology and White Redemption
Tuesday, February 20
JOHNSON, Chapter 5 (61 pp.)
Group #2: Discussion Leaders
Thursday, February 22
Cooper, “Ethics of the Negro Question” (10 pp.) – OAKS
Group #4: Critical Analysis Due

Week 8 – Anti-Colonialism and State Repression
Tuesday, February 27
JOHNSON, Chapter 6 (51 pp.)
Group #3: Discussion Leaders

Thursday, March 1
F.B.I., “Moorish Science Temple of America” – OAKS
Groups #1-2: Critical Analysis Due

Week 9 – Counterintelligence and the “Negro Rebellion”
Tuesday, March 6
JOHNSON, Chapter 7 (51 pp.)
Group #4: Discussion Leaders
Thursday, March 8
King, “Beyond Vietnam” – OAKS
Group #3: Critical Analysis Due

FREEDOM DREAMS
Week 10 – Wakanda and Democratic Dreams
Tuesday, March 13
BLACK PANTHER, Books 1-2
Thursday, March 15
BLACK PANTHER, Book 3

Monday, March 19 – Friday, March 23:
NO CLASS (Spring Break)
Week 11 – Oyotunji and Yoruba Dreams  
Tuesday, March 27  
  Long, “What is Africa to Me?” (17 pp.) – OAKS  
**EC: Tuesday, March 27: Dr. Simran Singh Comes to Campus**  
Thursday, March 29  
  Hucks, “Oyotunji African Village” (58 pp.) – OAKS  

**FIELD TRIP: Oyotunji African Village**

Week 12 – #BlackLivesMatter and Dreams of Black Liberation  
Tuesday, April 3  
Thursday, April 5  
  Taylor, Introduction to *How We Get Free* (14 pp.) – OAKS  
  “The Combahee River Collective Statement” – OAKS  

Week 13 – #BlackLivesMatter and Dreams of Black Liberation  
Tuesday, April 10  
  Cullors, Khan, and Alhassen, “No Ban, No Walls, No Prison, No Cops” – OAKS  

**Thursday, April 12: NO CLASS**

Week 14 – Ferguson and Freedom Dreams  
Tuesday, April 17  
  Sekou, “The Liberation Theology of Ferguson” (VIDEO) – OAKS  
Thursday, April 19  
  Kelley, “‘When History Wakes’: A New Beginning” (4 pp.) – OAKS  

**Final Project Due:** Tuesday, May 1 (11:00AM)