

# BLACK RELIGION AND BLACK NATIONALISM FROM SLAVE REBELLIONS TO BLACK LIVES MATTER

RELS 115: Religion and Society (ECTR 103)

TR 12:15PM-1:30PM (L01) | TR 1:40PM-2:55PM (L02)



*Rev. Osagyefo Sekou (center) and Rahiel Tesfamariam (right) march in Ferguson, MO*

## CONTACT

Professor: Dr. Matthew J. Cressler  
Office: 4C Glebe Street, Room 105  
Hours: MW 3:00 – 4:30PM  
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## DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the religious ideas and practices from across the African diaspora that gave rise to the political tradition now known as “Black nationalism.” While the tradition is often imagined to be secular (even anti-religious), this course explores the deep religious roots of Black struggles to create a new nation—from slave rebellions to the Black Power revolution to our contemporary Black Lives Matter movement. Students will survey Black religion and Black nationalism as well as examine the emergence of “religion” and “nationalism” as modern categories.

## OBJECTIVES

- 1) Introduce you to “religion” and “nation” as analytical categories
- 2) Introduce you to “race” and white supremacy in historical context
- 3) Introduce you to Black nationalism as a religio-political tradition
- 4) Hone your critical reading and thinking skills through disciplined engagement with texts, targeted assignments, and constructive conversation with classmates

## GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- 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 Empathy Essay.

## EVALUATION

### **20% Participation**

- You cannot participate if you are not present.
- Quality counts more than quantity, but you must speak to contribute.
- If you are worried about participation, meet with me (ASAP) to strategize.
- Here’s a breakdown of potential participation grades (there is no +/-):
  - **A:** almost always present in class, regularly demonstrates both verbal and nonverbal participation in class activities and discussions, consistently shows engagement with and (attempted) comprehension of readings.
  - **B:** almost always present, regularly demonstrates nonverbal but only occasionally verbal participation in activities and discussions, shows engagement with readings but comprehension occasionally unclear.
  - **C:** sporadically present, occasionally demonstrates verbal and nonverbal participation but often disconnected from activities and discussions, does not evidence consistent or sustained engagement with readings.
  - **F:** frequently absent, rarely demonstrates verbal or nonverbal participation in activities and discussions, consistently fails to show any attempt to complete or comprehend course readings; and/or disruptive.
- If you miss more than FIVE classes, you will be dropped from this course.

**40% Reading Quizzes** (5 quizzes, 10% each, drop the lowest): in-class comprehension quizzes

**5% Reflection Paper:** attend either Sheila Pree Bright’s or Angie Thomas’s event on campus and write a brief paper (1-2 double-spaced pages) reflecting on one thing you learned.

**10% Old Slave Mart Museum Reflection Paper:** write a brief paper (1-2 double-spaced pages) reflecting on our class field trip and responding to the essay prompt provided.

**25% Creative Character Essay:** creative writing assignment that asks you to write a short essay (4-5 double-spaced pages) from the vantage point of a character in the class. In it, you will craft an argument that attempts to convince a friend to join your respective cause: a slave revolt, the Nation of Islam, or the Movement for Black Lives.

**Extra Credit:** There will be a number of extra credit opportunities through the semester, most notably the African American Studies Film Festival. In order to receive extra credit, you must A) attend the event and B) write a short reflection on it (1-page, double-spaced, 12-point font). Your reflection is due to me via email within one week of said event. You may receive up to 2 bonus points on a Reading Quiz per extra credit event.

#### REQUIRED TEXTS

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 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 facilitate discussion.

There are two 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 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.

- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (Balantine Books, Reprint Edition, 1992)
- *David Walker's Appeal* (Hill and Wang, Revised Edition 1995)

#### EXPECTATIONS (to craft in class together)

##### For My Professor:

- 

##### For Myself:

- 

##### For Each Other:

- 

#### LATE POLICIES

- Class begins promptly at our designated course time on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I expect you to be seated and prepared for class when the proverbial iPhone strikes. 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. Prior commitments and other deadlines are not acceptable excuses for 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.

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

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 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 (SNAP) can be accessed via:

<http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/>.

## RELIGIOUS ACCOMODATION

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 Handbook* at <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>

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SCHEDULE (subject to change with advance notice)

### Introducing Our Critical Categories

Week 1 – January 8-10

Day 1: What's this course about? What's it *not* about?

Reading: NO READING

Day 2: "Religion" and "Race"

Reading: Paul Harvey, "Introduction: Religion and Race in American History" in *Bounds of their Habitation: Religion and Race in American History* (2016)

Friday, January 11: Sheila Pree Bright (#1960Now) comes to the College

"#Unapologetic," 7PM in Sotille Theatre

Monday, January 14: Angie Thomas (*The Hate U Give*) comes to the College

"An evening with Angie Thomas," 7PM in Sotille Theatre

Week 2 – January 15-17

Day 1: "Nation"

Reading: Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" (1882)

Day 2: Myths of American origins

Listening: *Hamilton: An American Musical* (2015)

Week 3 – January 22-24

Day 1: "The Danger of a Single Story"

Reading: Lyra Monteiro, "Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*" (2016)

Viewing: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story" (2009)

Day 2: Old Slave Mart Museum Field Trip (6 Chalmers St.)

Reading: Edward Baptist, "Feet" in *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (2014)

### Enslavement, Rebellion, and Emigration

Week 4 – January 29-31

Day 1: NO CLASS

\*\*\* Reflection Paper on campus event \*\*\*

Day 2: The danger of Charleston's single story

Reading: Gene Demby, "The Charleston Story: Race, Grace, and Injustice" (2016)

\*\*\* Old Slave Mart Museum Reflection Paper due \*\*\*

Monday, February 4, 6PM: African American Studies Spring 2019 Film Festival: *Blade*

Week 5 – February 5-7

Day 1: What does Africa have to do with America?

Reading: Sterling Stuckey, excerpts from “Introduction: Slavery and the Circle of Culture” in *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (1987)

Day 2: The foundations of Black America

Reading: Sterling Stuckey, excerpts from “Introduction: Slavery and the Circle of Culture” in *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (1987)

\*\*\* Quiz #1 \*\*\*

Monday, February 11, 6PM: AAST Spring 2019 Film Festival: *Beasts of the Southern Wild*

### HORRID MASSACRE IN VIRGINIA



The Scenes which the above Plate is designed to represent, are—Fig. 1. a Mother intrusting for the lives of her children.—2. Mr. Travis, cruelly murdered by his own Slaves.—3. Mr. Barrow, who bravely defended himself until his wife escaped.—4. A comp. of mounted Dragoons in pursuit of the Blacks.

*Newspaper rendering of Nat Turner's 1831 slave rebellion*

Week 6 – February 12-14

Day 1: “Real wrath of God type stuff”

Reading: *David Walker's Appeal* (1829), Preamble, Articles I and II

Day 2: Revolt and revolutionary violence

Reading: *David Walker's Appeal* (1829), Articles III and IV

Listening: Run the Jewels, “A Report to the Shareholders / Kill Your Masters” in *Run the Jewels 3* (2016)

Monday, February 18, 6PM: AAST Spring 2019 Film Festival: *Pumzi*, and other short films

Week 7 – February 19-21

Day 1: Emigration and Black nation-building

Reading: Martin Delany, “The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States” (1852)

Day 2: Debating “Back-to-Africa” movements

Reading: Frederick Douglass, “African Civilization Society” (1859)

Monday, February 25, 6PM: AAST Spring 2019 Film Festival: *Black Panther*

### **Apartheid, Migration, and Religio-Racial Nationalism**

Week 8 – February 26-28

Day 1: “Two-hundred and fifty years of slavery, ninety years of Jim Crow...”

Reading: Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations” (2014)

Day 2: The context and costs of Jim Crow America

Reading: Richard Wright, “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow” (1937)

\*\*\* **Quiz #2** \*\*\*

Week 9 – March 5-7

Day 1: Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association

Reading: “Declaration of the Rites of the Negro Peoples of the World” (1920)

Day 2: Black nationalist women and Pan-Africanism

Reading: Keisha Blain, “Women Pioneers in the Garvey Movement” in *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (2018)

Week 10 – March 12-14

Day 1: The Moorish Science Temple

Reading: Arthur Huff Fauset, “Moorish Science Temple of America” in *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (1944)

Day 2: “Come Home to Islam”

Reading: Judith Weisenfeld, “Geographies of Race and Religion” in *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity in the Great Migration* (2016)

\*\*\* **Quiz #3** \*\*\*

Spring Break (WOO!) – March 17-23



*Malcolm X (left, foreground), Louis Farrakhan (left, background), and Elijah Muhammad (center, seated) at Saviour's Day convention*

#### Week 11 – March 26-28

Day 1: Living “the American nightmare,” becoming Malcolm X

Reading: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X As Told To Alex Haley* (1965)

Day 2: Malik El-Shabazz and the Organization for Afro-American Unity

Reading: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X As Told To Alex Haley* (1965)

Listening: Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet”

#### Week 12 – April 2-4

Day 1: The promise and appeal of Black nationalist patriarchy

Reading: Ula Yvette Taylor, “The Appeal of Black Nationalism and the Promise of Prosperity” in *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (2017)

Day 2: The ironies and price of Black nationalist patriarchy

Reading: Farah Jasmine Griffin, “Ironies of the Black Saint’: Malcolm X, Black Women, and the Price of Protection” (2001)

\*\*\* Quiz #4 \*\*\*

#### **State Violence, the Movement for Black Lives, and Black Religion**

#### Week 13 – April 9-11

Day 1: Prisons, police, and anti-Black state violence

Reading: Patrisse Khan-Cullors & Asha Bandele, excerpt from *When They Call You A Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* (2018)

Day 2: White supremacy and the resurgence of white nationalism

Listening: A12 podcast, “Episode 1: The Summer of Hate” and “Episode 4: The Alt-Right Rises” (2018)

April 15-16: Jalane Schmidt (religion, race, and the Summer of Hate) comes to the College

Week 14 – April 16-18

Day 1: “Ain’t Yo Mama’s Civil Rights Movement”

Reading: Rahiel Tesfamariam, “How Black Activism Lost Its Religion” (2015)

Listening: Impolite Conversations podcast, “#BlackLivesMatter and Black Protestant Activism” (2015)

Day 2: Black religion and Black nationalism in the Black Lives Matter movement

Reading: Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou, “The Clergy’s Place is with the Protesters in Ferguson” (2015)

\*\*\* Quiz #5 \*\*\*

### Finals Week

\*\*\* Creative Character Essay due 12AM Tuesday morning, April 30 \*\*\*



*Black Lives Matter rally in Boston, MA*