

**RELS 120.1 Religion, Art & Culture/SOST 175.1 Religions in the American South Fall 2021**  
**“Searching for the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith in the South” (T/R 12:15-1:30)**

Prof. [Zeff Bjerken](#) (pronounced *byer-ken*; he/him) Office: [RELS Building @ 4A Glebe Street](#), room 101  
AJ Williamson, Teaching Apprentice (he/they) Office hours: M. 9:30-11:30; W. 12:30-2:30; and by appt  
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### **Course Description**

This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion and a survey of different understandings of the “sacred” in the American South. The theme of “searching for the sacred and the strange” takes us away from mainstream Protestant Christianity to examine the religiosity and aesthetic expression of marginalized folks, whose visionary experiences inspire their creation of religious art, music, and food. We begin by reading the studies of two “Road Scholars” who explore unusual forms of religiosity expressed in Southern stories, song and art while they undertake a common American ritual: the road trip. On their journeys they encounter religion on the rural margins of the South, yet they find themes that are central to American religious life: creativity as religious devotion and the desire to recreate sacred time and space. Then we move to New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz, where we will examine the relationship between African religions, voodoo, jazz funerals, and Mardi Gras Indians. Finally, we come full circle back to Charleston to examine the African American Gullah/Geechee tradition of communicating with the dead and African ancestors through visions, stories, sweetgrass basketry, and song. We will learn to see the customs, stories, and ritual performances as an expression of the religious imagination, where believers have sought to give aesthetic form to their experiences and re-create the “substance of faith.”

The course presumes no previous experience in religious studies, but it has as a prerequisite the desire to read challenging materials about different religions and to engage in conversation about them. We will rely on texts that combine travel narrative and storytelling, as well as films to gain insight into the sacred art, stories, music, food, and rituals that inspire faith and create ties that bind communities together. One of the fun things about this course is that we do some “traveling” across the American South through documentary and feature films and the HBO TV series *Treme*. You should consider these visual media as “texts,” for their content will be covered on exams and essay assignments.

### **Course Goals**

- to gain knowledge of religions beyond your own experience and develop new ways of hearing, seeing, sensing, and thinking about what is “sacred” in the American South
- to gain appreciation for the diversity of Southern subcultures and peoples, their shared humanity and creativity, especially among black folks and “outsiders”: artists, musicians, and storytellers

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

- students learn how to make what is strange seem familiar and what is familiar seem strange
- students learn to think critically and comparatively about their own and others’ religious traditions
- students learn to analyze how race, class, and gender shape religious and cultural productions
- students demonstrate effective writing skills by crafting an argument in defense of a thesis
- This course also satisfies the **General Education Student Learning Outcomes** in the Humanities: 1) *Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted and valued in various expressions of human culture*; and 2) *Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments*. These two Student Learning Outcomes will be assessed on the **final exam essay** that analyzes the religious ideas and practices in two different visual media, namely *Treme* and *Daughters of the Dust* (worth 15% of overall grade).

**Three Required Texts** are available at the **Barnes & Noble CofC Bookstore** or from Amazon:

- S. Brent Plate, *A History of Religion in 5½ Objects: Bringing the Spiritual to Its Senses*
- Timothy K. Beal, *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith*
- LeRhonda S. Manigault-Bryant, *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music, and Lived Memory Among Gullah/Geechee Women* (available free online from CofC library)

There are also required **E-Readings (ER#1-20)**, pdf of scholar’s articles and stories available on **OAKS**, which students access after they login to **MyCharleston**—<http://my.cofc.edu>. Look for the acorn icon.

### Course Requirements

- **Attendance Policy and Active participation in class (10% of grade)**

Whatever you get out of this course is directly related to how much you put into it. Please come to class with ideas and questions that can help our class engage in meaningful discussion. You cannot participate if you are not present. Quality counts more than quantity, but you must speak up to contribute. If you are worried about participation, let’s meet sometime soon after class or during office hours to strategize. Attendance records will be kept for each class. There will be **3** allowed absences; **4** or more absences will negatively affect your grade. After **8 absences**, you will be dropped from the class and you will earn an **F** for excessive absences. If you have documentation for absences that disrupt your attendance in class (illness, emergency), contact me or the Dean’s Office to document the reason for your absence. You are responsible for making up any absences; please get any notes on missed lectures from classmates.

- **Weekly Reflection Cards (15% of grade)**

There will be regular homework assignments. Every day marked on syllabus with **RC due** you are to bring to class a thoughtful, written reflection related to the assigned reading for that week. Your reflection should be written on a 3x5 or 5x7 card, and respond to an issue that you have found puzzling, provocative, challenging, disturbing, or fascinating. RC Grades: + = 100; √+ = 90; √ = 80; √- = 75; — = 70

- **Two short essays** of 2 pp. each (10% each for 20% of grade) due 9/7 & 9/30.

The essays will be written on the assigned reading in response to specific prompts. The essays will require that you analyze the texts closely, formulate an interpretation, and express it concisely in 2 pages. The essays are due in class on the day when we will discuss it; **late papers are not accepted** since the topic for the essay will be discussed in class.

- **Creative Project (15% of grade)** due 11/16

For this project you will creatively adapt key themes from the course into a new form of media. The project will include a creator’s statement that explains what you sought to accomplish, the sources that inform your project (a sacred text or story, or a key religious theme from the course), and how you reinterpret them into a new genre (such as a short story, music, visual art, video)

- **Midterm** on 10/13 (15%) and **Final Exam** on 12/13 (25%) = (40%)

The exams consist of multiple choice and short answer questions, and the identification and explanation of important passages excerpted from texts. The final exam is not comprehensive, but deals with the material from the second half of the semester; the final take-home essay topic will be given in advance. Review sheets will be provided beforehand. If you miss an exam and provide a documented excuse, I do give makeup tests but they may be harder than the one scheduled.

**Grading Scale:** A = 100-93 A- = 92-90 B+ = 89-87 B = 86-83 B- = 82-80 C+ = 79-77  
C = 76-73 C- = 72-70 D+ = 69-67 D = 66-63 D- = 62-60 F = 59-below



# IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS

This message brought to you by every instructor that ever lived.  
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- **Course Resources**

I encourage you to utilize the academic support services offered by the [Center for Student Learning](#) and the [Writing Lab](#) for assistance in study strategies and essay writing consultation. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information on the Center for Student Learning call **843.953.5635**. Here is a link for help on writing an [essay for Religious Studies](#).

- **Universal Learning and SNAP program:** I am committed to the principle of universal learning. This means that our classroom, our virtual spaces, our practices and our interactions be as inclusive as possible. Mutual respect, civility, and the ability to listen carefully are crucial to universal learning. Any student eligible for or needing accommodations because of a disability is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class or as soon as the student has been approved for services so that reasonable accommodations can be made. For more information on the SNAP program, see: <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu> or **843.953.1431**

- **Religious Observances and Accommodation**

The College of Charleston community is enriched by students of many faiths that have various religious observances, practices, and beliefs. Religious observances will be accommodated. If you need to be absent for any given class for a specific observance, please submit requests in writing to me by the end of the second week of class (September 2) so we can agree upon accommodations.

- **Coronavirus and Continuity of Learning—Dealing with the Pandemic and Hurricanes**

For now, this course is a **100% in-person class**. Our class will meet twice a week in **ECTR 219** and **masks are required at all times for attendance**. Only students in quarantine/isolation due to a Covid-positive test will be allowed to join the class by Zoom. Please do not take advantage of the pandemic to skip class. In-person attendance is required, for this is not a hybrid course. Before the drop/add deadline, students should decide whether the course plan matches their own circumstances.

However, it is quite possible that our class will be interrupted by the pandemic or by inclement weather and then we will pivot to online course delivery. In fact, it is very likely that hurricanes or the pandemic will force us to cancel and/or make up one or more class days this semester. As far as our class is concerned, get your books ASAP, so you have them. If and when classes are canceled and rescheduled, please pay close attention to your CofC email. If in-person classes are suspended due to extreme weather or the health pandemic, I will announce on OAKS and by your CofC email a detailed plan for a change of modality to ensure continuity of learning. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and internet access. **How should we behave online & in class?**

- **Ethical Guidelines for behavior in class and Netiquette for online interaction**

*Be patient and forgiving.* Go easy on each other. We all make mistakes. We’re all learning together.

*Be professional and help each other.* If a peer raises a question, and you know the answer, help them!

*Be kind.* Treat each other with the full respect and dignity each of you deserve.

*Be ethical.* Racist, sexist, homophobic, or any language or behavior that dehumanizes or degrades others will not be tolerated. Period.

*Cite your sources.* When you are building off or borrowing from others’ ideas, give them the credit they deserve, whether it’s from a classmate or an assigned reading.

- **Academic Integrity**

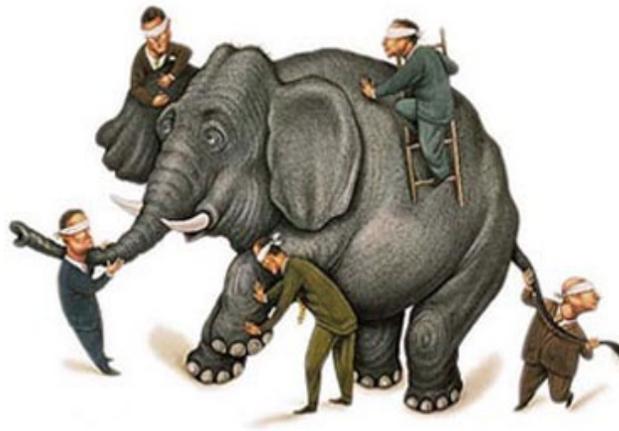
Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student’s action are related more to misunderstanding and confusion will be handled by me as the instructor. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a **XF grade** in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator will appear on the student’s transcript for two years. If you are unfamiliar with the [Honor Code](#) or what [plagiarism](#) is, please click on the links.

### **Lecture Topics and Class Schedule**

The following dates provide the topic of the day, the required reading (in the parenthesis) that is due before class meets, and when assignments are due. Selections from books like *Roadside Religion* list the chapters or page numbers; selections from the E-Readings (ER) on OAKS are numbered sequentially. For a complete list of the sources of the assigned E-Readings found on OAKS (ER#1-20), see below p. 8.

#### **I. Introduction: How Do We Study Religion in the Secular Academy?**

- 8/24      Organization of Course and Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion  
(Review Course Requirements and this Syllabus in class)
- 8/26      Ways of Exploring Religion: Who are the Nacirema?  
(ER#1-3: “Thinking About Being a Student of Religion;” “Body Rituals Among the Nacirema;”  
and “Religious Studies and Heaven’s Gate”) **RC#1 due**
- 8/31      Bringing the Spiritual to its Senses: What is this Religious “Stuff?”  
(*A History of Religion in 5½ Objects*, Chapters “½” & “Soul”) **RC#2 due**
- 9/2      Sensing Stones as Spiritual Objects: Nature Religion Rocks!  
(*A History of Religion in 5½ Objects*, Chapter on “Stones”)
- 9/7      Blind Men, Elephants (and their Dung) & the Holy Virgin Mary: Ways of Seeing Religiously  
(ER#4-6: “Blind Men & the Elephant,” “Interpreting the Sacred,” “Cultural Relativity of Dung”)  
**Essay #1:** The parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant is often cited by scholars as a useful way for thinking about the study of religions (e.g. in ER#5). *After considering the morals of the story, how is the parable useful for understanding religion? In what way is religion not like an elephant? Apply the parable to ER#6 and explain how the mixed responses to Chris Ofili’s provocative “Holy Virgin Mary” illustrate how we need to adopt multiple perspectives in order to “see religiously” and assess the work’s meaning.*



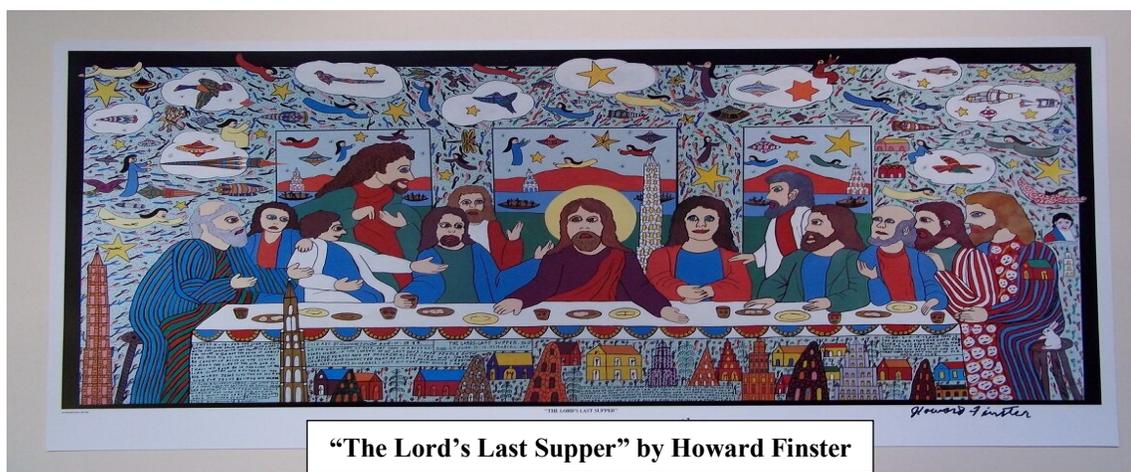
#### **II. Religion on the Road: Seeing the Sacred in Southern Evangelical Outsider Art**

*“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness—all foes to real understanding. Likewise, tolerance or broad wholesome charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in our little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.”* Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*

- 9/9      Surveying the Sacred from Outside: What is “Outsider” Art and Religion?  
(*Roadside Religion*: “Introduction” & Chapter 6) **RC#3 due**

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- 9/14 Now-a-Day Noahs: What Would Noah Do?  
(*Roadside Religion*: Chapters 4-5)
- 9/16 Re-creating the Holy Land: Making It Real  
(*Roadside Religion*: Chapters 1-2) **RC#4 due** Watch clip in class from Bill Maher’s [Religulous](#)
- 9/21 Seeking the Sacred in the South: Some Sad, Scary, and Mysterious Stories  
(Read ER#7: Excerpts from *A Childhood: The Biography of a Place*) **RC#5 due**  
Watch clips in class from film: [Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus](#), pt. I
- 9/23 Slain in the Spirit: Speaking in Tongues, Singing for God  
(Read ER#8: “God Not Only Speaks but Sings”) Film: *Searching for...Jesus*, pt. II
- 9/28 Paradise Gardens, a Folk Art Church: Is Creativity the Substance of Faith?  
(*Roadside Religion*: Chapter 10 & Conclusion) **RC#6 due** Finish: *Searching for... Jesus*, pt. III
- 9/30 Re-Viewing the Visionary World of Howard Finster: Art as Religion  
(ER#9: “Once Upon a Time: Encountering the Word Made Flesh”) **AJ Williamson, lecturer**  
**Essay#2 due:** Howard Finster is America’s most famous self-taught visionary artist, and unlike many other “outsider artists” his life story became well known and his art work was appreciated by many. *Explain how Finster’s art and his Paradise Garden illustrate a Bible-based story-shaped world, where nostalgia for the past and fear of the apocalypse are both present. Based on what you’ve read by Timothy Beal and Norman Girardot, is Paradise Garden primarily a place of apocalyptic prophecy or a place of creative healing? How does Girardot explain the religious and human significance of this strange art?*



**III. Tasting the Flavorful Foods and Hearing the Soulful Sounds of the South**

- 10/5 Food and Faith in the American South: Holy Smoke & Barbecue  
(ER#10: “Blood in the Barbecue?” and *A History of Religion in 5½ Objects*, “Drums” pp. 99-118)  
Watch clips in class from Chef’s Table BBQ: Rodney Scott in Charleston
- 10/7 To Be is to Beat: In Rhythm with African Spirits  
(ER#11: “West African Possession Religion & American Popular Music”) **RC#7 due**
- 10/12 **Midterm exam in class** (review Study Guide for exam)

**IV. New Orleans Voodoo, Jazz Religion, and “Masking” as Indians on Mardi Gras**

10/14 Congo Square in Faubourg Treme: African Gatherings, Birthplace of Jazz  
(ER#12: *Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans*) **RC#8 due**  
Documentary: [Faubourg Treme: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans](#)

10/19 **Fall Break!**

10/21 African Religions and Voodoo in New Orleans: Before and After Katrina  
(ER#13: “Follow the Second Line” and “Interlude”) **RC#9 due**  
Film: clips on [voodoo from Angel Heart](#)



Mardi Gras Indian Chief Calling Back Members of His Tribe After Hurricane Katrina (*Treme*)

10/26 Mardi Gras Indians and Second Line Parades  
(ER#14: “Mardi Gras Indians and Second Lines”) Clips from [HBO series Treme](#)

10/28 “Masking” as Indians: An Invented Tradition Driven by the Spirit of Resistance  
(ER#15: “We Won’t Bow Down”) **RC#10 due** *Treme* clips

11/2 New Orleans as City of the Dead, City of the Good Life: Jazz Funerals  
(ER#16: “In Rhythm with the Spirit”) *Treme* clips

11/4 Tourism and Race, Cultural Authenticity and Appropriation in *Treme*  
(ER#17A-B: “Begin Again” and “New Tourist Sights, Sights, and Sleights of Hand) **RC#11 due**  
*Treme* clips

11/9 Preserving New Orleans’ Culture after Katrina: Saving the City’s “Soul”  
(ER#18: *Why New Orleans Matters*) clips from Spike Lee’s [When the Levees Broke](#) (2006)

**V. Sensing the Sacred in Charleston: Gullah/Geechee Religion and Music**

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- 11/11    Encountering Charleston’s Ghosts at the Market: Making the Familiar Seem Strange  
(*Talking to the Dead*: pp. xiii-xix, 1-4, 16-31) **RC#12**
- 11/16    “Ah Tulk to de Dead All de Time”: What does it mean to “talk” to the “dead?”  
(*Talking to the Dead*: chapter 3)    Clips from the film: [\*Daughters of the Dust\*](#) pt. I  
**Creative Project due in class**
- 11/18    Trance and Dance in *Daughters of the Dust*  
(ER#19: “Repositioning: Center & Margin”) **RC#13 due** [\*Daughters of the Dust\*](#) (1991) pt. II
- 11/23    Sacred Stories Retold, New Rituals of Relation in *Daughters of the Dust*  
(ER#20: Dialogue between Julie Dash and bell hooks)    Finish [\*Daughters of the Dust\*](#)
- 11/25    **Thanksgiving Break** (give thanks, eat a feast with your family)
- 11/30    Celebrating the Dead and the Cost of Preserving the Past  
(*Talking to the Dead*, Chapter 5, Epilogue) **RC#14 due**
- 12/2    Painful Memories and Amazing Grace: Coming Full Circle to the College of Charleston  
(A Religious History of CofC: Critical Reflections on Religion & Race) **RC#15 due**  
**AJ Williamson, lecturer**



President Obama sings “Amazing Grace” at T. D. Arena (6/26/2015)

**12/13    1-3 pm Final Exam online** (Review study guide and write take-home essay)

Take home essay topic: *Compare and contrast two examples of “cultural borrowing” or “lived memory” that we have studied, namely African Americans “masking” as Mardi Gras Indians and any of Nana Peasant’s African practices featured in the film [\*Daughters of the Dust\*](#). Begin your essay by describing what differentiates the HBO TV series and the film as “sources:” explain when and why each was made, what their genre is, and how their narratives are structured. Next, describe and interpret specific scenes in each work that illustrate the idea of “cultural borrowing” or “lived memory” and explain whether those scenes illustrate religion as re-ligare or re-legere. Explain what “cultural appropriation” means and whether it is meaningful to apply this phrase to the specific examples that you analyze.*

**Sources for ER Articles on OAKS**

1. Gary E. Kessler, “Thinking about Being a Student of Religion” from *Studying Religion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008), pp. 1-13.
2. Horace Miner, “Body Rituals Among the Nacirema,” *American Anthropologist* (1956), pp. 503-507.
3. Mark W. Muesse, “Religious Studies and ‘Heaven’s Gate’: Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange” in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, ed. by Russell McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 390-394.
4. John Godfrey Saxe, “The Blind Men and the Elephant” in *Communications, the Transfer of Meaning*, Don Fabun (New York: MacMillan, 1968), p. 13.
5. William Paden, “Preface” and “Interpretive Frames,” from *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), ix-13.
6. Brent Plate, “Introduction” to *Religion, Art, and Visual Culture: A Cross-Cultural Reader* ed. by Brent Plate (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 1-12; 53-58.
7. Harry Crews, *A Childhood: A Biography of a Place* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 51-97.
8. Lee Smith, “Tongues of Fire” in *The Christ-Haunted Landscape: Faith and Doubt in Southern Fiction* ed. by Susan Ketchin (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1994), pp. 3-43.
9. Norman Girardot, “Once Upon a Time: Encountering the Word Made Flesh” from his *Envisioning Howard Finster: The Religion and Art of a Stranger from Another Planet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), pp. 1-27.
10. Wade Clark Roof, “Blood in the Barbecue? Food and Faith in the American South,” in *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition ed. by Eric Michael Mazur and Katie McCarthy (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 108-119.
11. Robin Sylvan, “West African Possession Religion & American Popular Music” from his *Traces of Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), pp. 45-75.
12. Freddi Williams Evans, *Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2011), pp. ix-xii; 47-61; 115-121.
13. Richard Turner, “Follow the Second Line” and “Interlude” from *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), pp. 1-11; 18-28; 69-76.
14. Richard Turner, “Mardi Gras Indians, Second Lines” from *Jazz Religion*, pp. 39-68.
15. Ned Sublette, “We Won’t Bow Down” from *The World that Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008), pp. 293-311.
16. Richard Turner, “In Rhythm with the Spirit” from *Jazz Religion*, pp. pp. 97-105; 112-117; 126-133.
- 17A. Duncan Merrell “Begin Again: The Anxiety of Authenticity” in *Oxford American*, (December 12, 2012), Issue 79.
- 17B. Lynnel L. Thomas, “New Tourist Sights, Sights, and Sleights of Hand in HBO’s *Treme*” in *HBO’s Treme and Post-Katrina Catharsis: The Mediated Rebirth of New Orleans*, ed. by Dominique Gendrin, Catherine Dessinges, and Shearon Roberts (Lexington Books: 2017), pp. 65-80.
18. Tom Piazza, *Why New Orleans Matters* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. 11-36; 152-163; 169-187.
19. Joel R. Brouwer, “Repositioning: Center and Margin in *Daughters of the Dust*” in *African American Review*, Vol. 29 no. 1 (Spring, 1995), pp. 5-16.
20. Julie Dash, “Dialogue between Julie Dash and bell hooks” in *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of an African American Woman’s Film* (New York: The New Press, 1992), pp. 27-67.

**Terms to Review for Quizzes and Exams (next page)**

The study of different religions is a lot like studying a foreign language: gaining “religious literacy” can occur only after acquiring a new vocabulary of key terms used in each religion and developing mastery of the technical terms that scholars use in their study of these religions and their location in the US South.

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Below are terms that you must know in order to do well on the two quizzes and exams.  
Keep this list handy as you read the assignments and write down their meanings.

**Key terms used in the Study of Religion and Southern Outsider Art**

Theology, Insider’s vs. Outsider’s perspectives on religion, empathy, bracketing  
Ethnocentrism, “making the strange seem familiar and the familiar seem strange,” body rituals  
Half-body, religious people as technologists, technology and forgetfulness  
Elephant & Blind Men parable, hip-hop Virgin Mary, visual culture, iconoclasm, idolatry  
Orthodox vs. “Outsider” religion, sacred vs. profane, pilgrimage, sacred narratives & story-shaped worlds  
Faith vs. irony & cynicism, *re-legere* vs *re-ligare*, intra-mental vs. extra-mental idea  
Golgotha, narrative arrangement of space, paradox of sacred, gaps in Noah narrative  
Apocalypse, cosmic dualism, proselytize, Book of Revelation, New Jerusalem  
Harry Crews, Southern Gothic, possum and bird stories, conjuring, blood as symbol  
Pentecostal, speaking in tongues, gift of the Holy Spirit, social marginality & religious vision  
Creativity as religious devotion, production vs. sacred creation, “spiritual authenticity,” Biblical literalism  
Religious re-creation, nostalgia, born again experience, memory and myth

**Soulful Sounds and Flavorful Foods of the South**

Religious functions of drumming, mystical at-one-ment, ephemeral drumbeats  
Shaman, ecstatic soul travel, spirit possession, enthusiasm, trance, collective self-transcendence  
West African spirituality, call and response, crossroads, vodou, loa/lwa, emotional catharsis in the Blues

**New Orleans’ Voodoo, Jazz Religion, and “Masking” as Indians**

Code Noir, Cajun, Creole, Congo Square, WWOZ  
Voodoo, Catholic-African syncretism, ancestral spirits, vèvè, gris-gris, Marie Laveau  
Faubourg Tremé, second line, jazz funeral, improvisation, Kermit Ruffins, Dr John  
Indian masking, invented tradition, Indian Red, Chief “Tootie” Montana, Congo Nation  
Cities of the Dead, Social Aid & Pleasure Clubs, All Saints Day, Gede spirits, trickster  
Cultural authenticity vs. appropriation, preservation purists, Bounce-Brass Band fusion, Lil Calloiope  
Al Sharpton, Black Men of Labor, Sheldon Alexander, Beatitudes, top-down vs. bottom-up revitalization



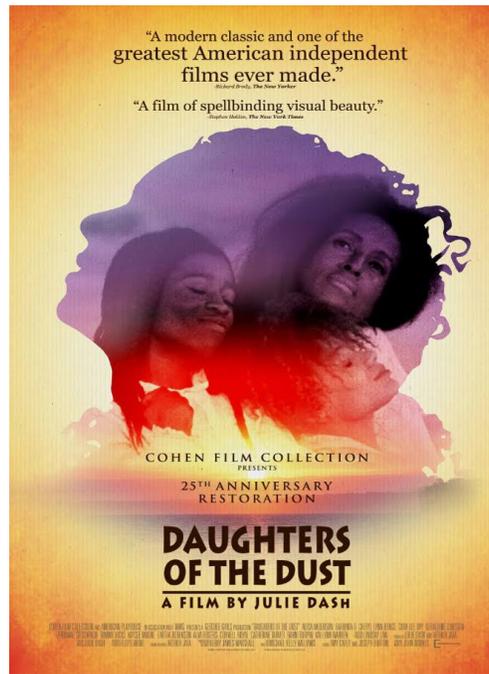
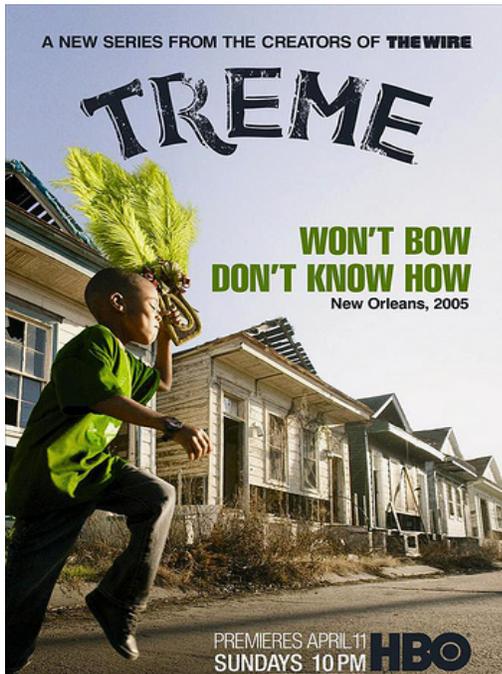
**Sensing the Sacred in Charleston: Gullah-Geechee Religious Practice**

Manigault’s insider/outsider status, Africanisms, Gullah Geechee, tide metaphor, “lived religion”  
Talking to the dead, Holy Spirit vs. ancestral spirits, *griot*, *Daughters of the Dust*, Nana Peazant  
Yenenga/Caroline White, buckra, seekin,’ Lowcountry clap, cyclical time, polyrhythms, call & response  
Black Church as “hush harbor,” Mother Emanuel, *Amazing Grace*, cultural commodification

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**“Searching for the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith in the South” (T/R 12:15-1:30)**

**About Prof. Bjerken:** I grew up on the west coast in beautiful Santa Barbara California, went to Reed College in Portland Oregon (where I majored in religion), earned a MA degree in religious studies at UC Santa Barbara, before I moved to Ann Arbor Michigan to pursue degrees in Buddhist Studies (I have a PhD in B.S.!). Since graduating from college, I have spent many years living in Buddhist monasteries and traveling throughout India, especially in the Himalayas of North India. But I’ve also explored the Appalachian mountains and spent time in New Orleans, one of my favorite cities. When not at work, I enjoy watching sports (especially CofC basketball—go Cougs!), biking, canoeing, and hiking in the mountains, and going on long road trips in the South, in the Pacific Northwest, and in Western Canada.

I joined the Department of Religious Studies at the CofC in 1999, when I was hired to teach courses in Asian religions (Religion and Society in India and Tibet, Buddhist and Hindu Traditions, Religions of China & Japan, Sacred Texts of the East, Tibetan Buddhism). But I also teach thematic courses like this one on “Religion, Art & Culture” or “Religions in the American South,” “Religion and Globalization” and “Religion and Violence.” Learning about different religions should be an intellectual adventure that engages the imagination, and I have chosen reading material and films (like those featured below) that I hope you will find fascinating. I expect students to come prepared and make meaningful contributions to our class discussions. If you are experiencing challenges that make it difficult for you, I encourage you to meet with me after class or during office hours so that we can work together to develop a solution.



**About AJ Williamson (Teaching Apprentice):** I was born and raised in Charleston, so I have a lot of love for this city and the South in general, especially when it comes to our rich religious diversity. This is my senior year at CofC and I’ll be graduating with a degree in Religious Studies (and a minor in Creative Writing). During my time as a religious studies student, I’ve worked on projects about contemporary feminist theology, biblical literary history, and this year I’ll be working on my bachelor’s essay about religion, intimacy, and art! I also spent last year working as a member of a team doing archival research about the history of religion at the College, which I’m excited to share with you all at the end of the semester. When I’m not stuck in the library, I love to watch horror movies, cook with my friends, read in the park, and take walks around the city.