

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

RELS 115.01 + 115.02 | Religion and Society  
TR 9:25-10:40 + 10:50-12:05PM | ECTR 219



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

## YOUR PROFESSOR

**Who am I?** Dr. Matthew J. Cressler, associate professor of religious studies (affiliate faculty, African American studies). You can call me Prof. Cressler, Dr. Cressler, you can even call me Matthew. Just not Mr. Cressler. Please and thank you.

**How can you reach me?** [cresslermj@cofc.edu](mailto:cresslermj@cofc.edu). Email is my preferred and most frequent form of communication. If you email me on a weekday, I tend to respond within 24 hours. If you email me on a weekend, you may have to wait till Monday. You can also call my office (843-953-1026) and leave a voicemail, but my response will be slower.

**Where will we be meeting for class?** In Education Center, room 219, on Tuesdays and Thursdays either from 9:25-10:40 (115.01) or from 10:50-12:05 (115.02).

**When else can you meet with me?** I will hold open office hours on **Wednesdays 1-3PM** in my office in the back annex of 4 Glebe St. This means, unless I tell you otherwise, I'll be in my office at those times and you can meet with me without an appointment. If you would like to schedule a meeting ahead of time, simply email me to arrange a time.

## **OUR COURSE**

**What is it about?** This course will introduce you to religious ideas and practices from across the African diaspora that gave rise to the political tradition now known as “**Black nationalism.**” While it 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.

**How will it run?** This is an in-person course. This means that, so long as campus is open, we will meet in-person. Repeat: *this is neither an online nor a hybrid course.* Your attendance and participation is essential for your success in this class. You should decide whether this works for you before the drop/add deadline (Monday, August 29).

We don't have excess space in our classroom and cannot fully socially distance. Thus, you are *strongly encouraged* to get vaccinated to protect yourself and classmates and *not allowed* to come to class during your isolation period if you contract COVID, per [college guidelines](#). Vaccinations are available for free on campus: [learn more here](#).

Due to the reality of COVID (not to mention hurricanes and other plagues), we may be required to shift gears and move the course online. This could involve changing due dates and course requirements, but we will do everything necessary to ensure our collective safety. Let's all strive to be patient and flexible!

**What will you learn?** So many things! But here are our course learning outcomes. By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- Identify Black nationalism as a religio-political tradition
- Situate white supremacy, racial justice movements, and religion in their social, political, cultural context and chart how they have changed over time
- Recognize “religion,” “race,” and “nation” as categories created together in the modern world and identify how they are inseparable from one another
- Engage in constructive conversation with your peers on difficult subjects often deemed “not fit for the dinner table”—religion, race, and politics in America

**Does it fulfill your general education requirement in huma**—Yes! This course fulfills the general education requirement in the humanities. Here are your Learning Outcomes for the Humanities in the General Education curriculum:

- 1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.

2) 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 your Creative Character essay.

**What will you need?** Lots a stuff. Here's a list.

- **Books**
  - **REQUIRED:** *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley* (1965)
  - **RECOMMENDED:** James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (1963)
  - All other assigned readings will be posted on OAKS under Content.
    - **Note to self:** both books are available for purchase via the CofC bookstore and can be found easily elsewhere online.
- **Tech**
  - Regular access to a computer (i.e. NOT your phone) with reliable internet
  - A webcam and microphone (these are typically built into your computer, but if they aren't, you can purchase an inexpensive set for \$15)
    - **Note to self:** given the world we live in, we may need to pivot to online instruction at a moment's notice, so a computer and reliable Internet access are essential elements for success.
    - You may have heard that there is now a Laptop Requirement for students at the College. For reduced prices, financial aid, and to find potential loaner laptops, [check out this page our IT website](#).
- **Old school tech (aka, a notebook)**
  - Whether you're old school and like taking notes on paper with a pen/cil, or you prefer to take notes digitally (in Microsoft Word, Google Docs, Evernote, or some other digital platform) you're going to need to take good notes! So buy a notebook and/or set up a digital space to keep em.
    - **Note to self:** take good notes! Take notes on the readings you read, the videos as you watch, on the podcasts you listen to, the lectures you attend, and the discussions we have. This will be an essential element you'll use to study for exams.

**How will your work be evaluated?**

- ✓ **What Makes You You video essay (5%)** You'll do a little bit of autobiographical reflection and record a short video introducing yourself to your classmates. This very (very!) short video essay is **due by class on Tuesday, August 30**.
- ✓ **Daily Exit Tickets (15%)** Each class will end with a very short writing assignment where you reflect on what you've learned and/or what questions you still have.
- ✓ **Exam #1 (15%)** You'll take two in-class exams to assess your comprehension of and engagement with the course in the preceding weeks. The first exam will be on **Thursday, September 29 and cover material from weeks 1 through 6**.
- ✓ **Exam #2 (15%)** Your second exam to assess comprehension and engagement will be on **Thursday, October 27 and cover material from weeks 6 through 10**.
- ✓ **Creative Character Essay (20%)** You'll write a short essay (3-4 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 support your respective cause: a slave uprising, reparations, the Nation of Islam, or the Movement for Black Lives. It is [due via Dropbox on OAKS by 11:59PM on Tuesday, November 22](#).

- ✓ **Final Exam (30%)** You'll conclude class with a timed, cumulative exam that asks you to apply what you've learned this semester in short answers and essays. Our final exam dates/times are [Thursday, December 8 from 10:30AM-12:30PM](#) (RELS 115.01) and [Monday, December 12, 1:00PM-3:00PM](#) (RELS 115.02), respectively.

#### Extra Credit

- ✓ You may earn extra credit by reading James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* and writing a short reflection paper on it (2-3 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font). See professor if you're interested in this opportunity.

## OUR POLICIES

### What if you're late in turning something in?

- Assignments are due at the time specified on the assignment itself. When an assignment is turned in after the designated deadline, it's considered late. You will be penalized for late material – one letter grade (10 points) per day – but taking the penalty is always better than taking a 0! *Turn in your materials!*
- 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 ☺). But, it is crucial that we all learn to plan ahead and balance our respective responsibilities. Please keep an eye on all your commitments and deadlines as you plan your semester.
- We are increasingly dependent on our technologies. Yet, as you know, our tech can fail us. Computers crash, servers are sometimes down, etc. Make sure you work to complete assignments well enough in advance to factor in these variables and always (ALWAYS) back up your documents!!! The easiest way to do this, of course, is to work in a cloud-based app like Google Drive.

### What if you're sick or you've been exposed to someone who is COVID+?

- If you have been exposed to COVID, get tested. Rapid tests are reliable and readily available. If you test positive, **DO NOT COME TO CLASS**. Notify any potential close contacts and begin your quarantine, per [college guidelines](#).
- Students quarantining due to a positive COVID test should contact me (your professor) for instructions on how/when to join class via Zoom. Only students quarantining due to a COVID positive test will be allowed to join class via Zoom.
- "I might have COVID" is not the same as "I have COVID." Please do not take advantage of the situation to simply not come to class. In-person attendance and participation is essential to your success in the class. This is not a hybrid course.

### What other course and College policies do you need to know about?

**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 website](#) here to arrange accommodations.

**Religious Accommodation** Religious practices differ from tradition to tradition and the demands of religious observance in some traditions may cause conflicts with student schedules. If you require “reasonable accommodation for religious observance” please let me know. [The College’s full policy can be found here.](#)

**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 here.](#)

**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. You can visit [the Writing Lab virtually here.](#)

**Honor Code And Academic Integrity** Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that I will report, if suspected, to the Dean of Students. Students found responsible for academic dishonesty will be disciplined by the Honor Board, accordingly. You should be aware that unauthorized collaboration—i.e. working together without permission—is a form of cheating. Unless I specify that you can work together on a graded assignment, no collaboration during the completion of an assignment is permitted. You can access the complete [Honor Code and related processes online here.](#)

## OUR EXPECTATIONS

### What expectations do we have for our class community?

- Of ourselves
  -
- Of each other
  -
- Of our professor
  -

## USER MANUAL

How will you access materials each week? The course material has been organized into 15 content modules on OAKS (one for each week of the semester). I encourage you to

look ahead to set your own weekly schedule to work through the material to avoid procrastination. Submodules will instruct you to do things like:

- 1) **Read** (from a required text, in a book or posted on OAKS)
- 2) **Watch/Listen** (required videos, lectures, podcasts, documentaries, etc.)
- 3) **Answer** (questions to answer in your notebook on what you've read/watched)
- 4) **Complete** (assignments, almost all of which will be submitted via OAKS)

**Note:** Assigned readings and viewings should be completed ***BEFORE*** you come to class.

**No, but, like... how will you do all those things?** We'll use a number of tools to facilitate learning and build community this semester beyond meeting in our physical classroom. Here's a quick list of each tool, how we're using it, and a link to help you learn how to use it. All of you have access to all these tools for \$Free.99 as CofC students. First things first, here's a link to Student Instructional Tech Services: <http://blogs.cofc.edu/sits/>.

- 1) **OAKS** will be where most of the fun will happen when we're not in our classroom, so get ready!
  - a) I'll use **OAKS news/announcements** and **email** to update you as we move through the course, so make sure you check both throughout the week.
  - b) I'll be posting readings, assignments, and other course materials under **content on OAKS**. There will be checklists to keep you on your toes.
  - c) We may use the **OAKS discussion board** for community-building and learning activities, from ice-breakers to discussions and even debates!
  - d) You'll submit other graded materials via OAKS **assignments/Dropbox**. This is also where you'll find your grades and receive feedback from me.
  - e) Here's [a link to a whole bunch of OAKS tutorials](#), if you need help.
- 2) **Kaltura** is a video-making (and -watching) tool embedded in OAKS that you'll use to record (and view) your video essays for the semester.
- 3) **Kanopy** is how we'll watch most documentaries and films (when they're not on YouTube). I'll link them directly on OAKS (surprise!), but you can also access the full database on our library's website (click "Databases," then "K," and it's there).

*[subject to change with advance notice]*

### **Week 1 (August 23 and 25): Who am I? Who are we?**

- Tuesday
- Thursday
  - Reading: Patrisse Khan-Cullors and asha bandele, "We Are Stardust"

### **Week 2 (August 30 and September 1): What are we talking about?**

- Tuesday
  - Reading: Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" (1882)
  - [Due via Kaltura: What Makes You You video essay](#)
- Thursday
  - Podcast: "How race was made" (*Seeing White*, part 2)

### **Week 3 (September 6 and 8): Stories we tell ourselves...**

- Tuesday
  - Film: *Hamilton: An American Musical* (2015)
- Thursday
  - Reading: Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Our democracy's founding ideals were false..."

### **Week 4 (September 13 and 15): Africans before America**

- Tuesday
  - Reading: Ras Michael Brown, "Place, Culture, Power" in *African-Atlantic Cultures*
- Thursday
  - Documentary: "The Black Atlantic" (*The African Americans*)

### **Week 5 (September 20 and 22): Slavery and the making of the Americas**

- Tuesday
  - Podcast: "The Sentence" (Uncivil, episode 8)
- Thursday: [Field Trip: Old Slave Mart Museum \(6 Chalmers St.\)](#)

### **Storm Make-up Days: September 24 and 25**

### **Week 6 (September 27 and 29): Slave uprisings in America**

- Tuesday
  - Reading: David Walker and Maria Stewart on the evils of slavery
- Thursday: [Exam #1](#)

### **Week 7 (October 4 and 6): The afterlives of enslavement**

- Tuesday:
  - Reading: Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations"
- Thursday
  - Reading: Nikole Hannah-Jones, "What Is Owed"

### **Week 8 (October 11 and 14): The making of African America**

- Tuesday
  - Lecture: Yvonne Chireau, "Black Magic Matters: Hoodoo as Ancestral Religion"
- Thursday
  - Film: Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991)

### **Week 9 (October 18 and 20): The rise of apartheid America**

- Tuesday
  - Reading: Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Jim Crow"
- Thursday
  - Documentary: "Making a Way Out of No Way" (*The African Americans*)



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

### **Week 10 (October 25 and 27): Religio-racial Black nationalism**

- Tuesday
  - Reading: U.N.I.A., "Declaration of the Rites of the Negro Peoples of the World"
  - Reading: "What the Muslims Want and Believe"
- Thursday: [Exam 2](#)

### **Week 11 (November 1 and 3): The making of Malcolm X**

- Tuesday: [Anthony Pinn speaks at the Avery Research Center \(125 Bull St.\)](#)
- Thursday
  - Reading: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley*

### **Fall Break: November 7 and 8**

### **Week 12 (November 10): The legacies of Malcolm X**

- Thursday
  - Reading: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley*

### **Storm Make-up Days: November 12-13**

### **Week 13 (November 15 and 17): Beyond Black nationalism**

- Tuesday
  - Reading: Farah Jasmine Griffin, "Ironies of the Black Saint..."



- Thursday
  - Reading: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “Until Black women are free...”

### **Week 14 (November 22): The Movement for Black Lives**

- Tuesday
  - Film: Sabaah Folayan and Damon Davis, *Whose Streets?* (2017)
  - [Due via OAKS Dropbox: Creative Character Essay](#)

### **Thanksgiving: November 23-27**

### **Week 15 (November 29 and December 1): Black Lives Matter and religion**

- Tuesday
  - Reading: Rahiel Tesfamariam, “Why the modern civil rights movement keeps religious leaders at arms length”
- Thursday
  - Reading: “Religion, Secularism, and Black Lives Matter” (*The Immanent Frame*)

### **Reading Day: December 6**

**Final Exam:** [RELS 115.01: Thursday, December 8, 10:30AM – 12:30PM](#)  
[RELS 115.02: Monday, December 12, 1:00PM – 3:00PM](#)

