

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

HONS 250.04 | TR 1:40-2:55PM | ECTR 103



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

THE PROFESSOR

Who am I? Dr. Matthew J. Cressler, assistant 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. 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'll have to wait till Monday. You can also call my office (843-953-1026) and leave a voicemail, but my response time will be slower.

Where will we be meeting for class (in person)? In the Education Center, room 103, on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:40-2:55PM.

When can you see me (online)? Wednesdays between 1-3PM I will host open office hours on Zoom, which means I'll be online and you can chat with me without an

appointment. If you would like to schedule a private one-on-one Zoom meeting with me and/or our Tuesday time doesn't work, email me to arrange an appointment.

THE COURSE

What is it about? 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.

How will it run? This is an in-person course. This means that, so long as campus is open, we will meet in-person and in a classroom. We will, of course, wear masks, sanitize our seats, and remain socially distanced. Tuesdays will tend to be more me-focused (i.e. leaning toward lectures), Thursdays will tend to be more you-focused (i.e. leaning toward discussions). However, as you'll discover, every day is interactive. If you are symptomatic and/or if you've been exposed to someone who is COVID+, **PLEASE DO NOT COME TO CLASS!!!** If in-person instruction is put on hold, we'll adjust accordingly.

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:

- Recognize “religion,” “race,” and “nation” as categories created together in the modern world and identify examples of their inseparability
- Situate white supremacy and anti-racism and their relation to religion in their social, political, cultural context and chart how they have changed over time
- Identify Black nationalism as a religio-political tradition
- Engage in conversation on difficult subjects often deemed “not fit for the dinner table”--religion, race, and politics in the Americas
- Hone your critical reading and thinking skills through disciplined engagement with texts, targeted assignments, and constructive conversation with classmates

What will you need? Lots a stuff. Here's a list of the stuff you'll need.

- **Tech**
 - Regular access to a computer (i.e. NOT your phone)
 - Regular, reliable access to the 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: this is a synchronous online course, 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.](#)

- **Books**
 - *David Walker's Appeal* (Hill and Wang, Revised Edition 1995)
 - James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Orbis, 20th Anniversary Edition 2012)
 - Patrisse Khan-Cullors and asha bandele, *When They Call You A Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* (St. Martin's Press 2018)
 - Note to self: both books are available for purchase via the CofC bookstore and can be found easily elsewhere online.
 - All other assigned readings will be posted on OAKS under Content.
- **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 is where you should answer the questions I post on OAKS each week. And this will be an essential element you'll use to study for quizzes.

THE CONTRACT

How will your learning be assessed?

- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Attendance and participation (20%)** 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. And you cannot participate if you are not present. 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.
- ✓ **Discussion Board (20%)** You will post on our OAKS discussion board by 12:00AM midnight Wednesday prior to our Thursday classes.

- Your post should do two things:
 1. Rearticulate the most important point in your own words.
 2. Pose a question raised by the reading for discussion in class.
- Your posts will be graded on the following scale:
 - ✓ (10 pts)
 - ✓ - (7 pts)
 - 0 (0 pts)
- I will drop your lowest three discussion post grades.
- Please read your peers' posts in preparation for class.
- Gif and meme usage *strongly encouraged*.
- ✓ **Reading Reflection and Analysis (20%):** write a brief paper (2-3 double-spaced pages) analyzing one assigned reading through the theoretical lens of our course. We will choose which assigned readings you will write on in class on **January 28**.
- ✓ **Unessay (30%)** our cumulative course project that will ask you to creatively engage with one of the Black nationalist causes and/or movements of the course: a slave revolt, the reparations debate, a religio-racial movement, or the Movement for Black Lives. (I'll discuss details and deadlines on **February 11**.)
- ✓ **Where We've Been & What I've Learned video essay (5%)** You'll end the course with a short (meta-cognitive) reflection on what you've learned this semester.

What if I'm 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) for each 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 devices and other technologies. However, as I know you know, technology can fail us. Computers crash, iPads break, servers are sometimes down, etc. Make sure you aim to complete assignments well enough in advance to factor in these variables and remember, always (ALWAYS!) back up your documents!!!

What if I'm sick or I've been exposed to someone who is COVID+?

- As noted above, this is an in-person course, so I expect you to be in attendance...
- **UNLESS** you're sick, exhibiting symptoms of COVID, and/or you've been exposed to someone who is COVID+, in which case, **DO NOT COME TO CLASS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**
- If you miss class due to illness or self-isolation, please contact me (your friendly, neighborhood professor) to hear what you've missed, reach out to a peer from class for notes, and plan to attend one of my office hours.

But how do I know if I have COVID? What symptoms should I look out for?

- People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear **2-14 days after exposure to the virus**. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19:
 - Fever or chills
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle or body aches
 - Headache
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Sore throat
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Diarrhea
- But remember, you can be COVID+ and be an asymptomatic carrier! In other words, you can have COVID, be contagious, but feel fine and show no symptoms.
- This is why all of us should take advantage of our free, voluntary testing at the College whenever it's available! And why you should always wear your mask, wash your hands regularly, maintain social distancing practices, and act like there's a global pandemic – ***because there's still a global pandemic!!!***

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. This should be less of a problem with this synchronous online course, but 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—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](#).

THE MAP

How will you navigate this course 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 the following things:

- 1) **Read** (from a required text when bolded, all other readings 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** (most assignments will be due by midnight Monday morning at 12AM)

Note on order of completion: Always complete the assigned reading/viewing for any given day **BEFORE** you come to class. Complete the submodules in order on OAKS.

No, but, like... how will you navigate this course each week? 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 semester, so make sure you check both 4 days a 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'll use the **OAKS discussion board** for both community-building and learning activities, from ice-breakers to discussions and even debates!
 - d) You'll take **quizzes** on OAKS and submit other graded materials via **OAKS assignments/Dropbox**. This is also where you'll be able see 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 (January 12 and 13): Who are we?

- Tuesday:
 - YouTube: Anthony Pinn, "African American Religious Diversity and Dialogue"
- Wednesday
 - [Due via Kaltura: What Makes You You video essay \(5%\)](#)
- Thursday
 - Watch your peers' video essays on Kaltura

Week 2 (January 19 and 21): What are we talking about?

- Tuesday: What are "race" "and religion"?
 - Podcast: "How race was made"
 - Paul Harvey, "Introduction: Religion and Race in American History"
- Thursday: What is a "nation"?
 - Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" (1882)

Week 3 (January 26 and 28): American origin stories

- Tuesday: American origin stories
 - Podcast: "The Fight for a True Democracy"
- Thursday: American ongoing stories
 - *The 1619 Project*
 - [Schedule Secondary Source Analysis papers](#)

Week 4 (February 2 and 4): Slavery and the Making of America

- Tuesday: The Atlantic slave trade
 - YouTube: "The Atlantic slave trade"
 - Kanopy: "The Downward Spiral"
- Thursday: The domestic slave trade
 - Edward Baptist, "Feet" in *The Half Has Never Been Told*

Week 5 (February 9 and 11): Rise up!

- Tuesday: Discussing *David Walker's Appeal*
 - *David Walker's Appeal* (1829): Preamble, Articles I and II
- Thursday: Debating revolutionary violence
 - *David Walker's Appeal* (1829): Articles III and IV
 - Run the Jewels, "A Report to the Shareholders / Kill Your Masters" (2016)
 - [Discuss Unessay details and deadlines](#)

Week 6 (February 16 and 18): The Making of African America

- Tuesday: Black women and the birth of African American culture
 - LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant, “Gullah/Geechee Women” in *Talking to the Dead*
- Thursday: What does Africa have to do with African America?
 - YouTube: *Daughters of the Dust* (1991)

Week 7 (February 23 and 25): The Afterlives of Enslavement

- Tuesday: Discussing “The Case for Reparations”
 - Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”
- Thursday: Debating reparations and paying moral debts
 - Matthew Cressler and Adelle Banks, “50 Years After ‘Black Manifesto,’ Religious Groups Take Up Reparations Again”

Week 8 (March 2 and 4): Pan-Africanist Black Nationalism

- Tuesday: The making of the Universal Negro Improvement Association
 - Keisha Blain, “Women Pioneers in the Movement” in *Set the World on Fire*
- Thursday: Declaring rights and taking names
 - U.N.I.A., “Declaration of the Rites of the Negro Peoples of the World” (1920)

March 8 Midterm Grades Due

Week 9 (March 9 and 11): Religio-racial Black Nationalism

- Tuesday: Religio-racial movements in the Great Migrations
 - Judith Weisenfeld, “Geographies of Race and Religion” in *New World A-Coming*
- Thursday: The Nation of Islam
 - Hon. Elijah Muhammad, “What the Muslims Want and Believe”



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

Week 10 (March 16 and 18): Discussing Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X

- Tuesday: The making of Martin and Malcolm
 - James Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America*, Introduction and Chapters 1-2
- Thursday: Integration versus Nationalism
 - Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America*, Chapters 3-4

Week 11 (March 23 and 25): Debating Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X

- Tuesday: Rev. Martin and Minister Malcolm
 - Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America*, Chapters 5-6
- Thursday: The turn toward each other
 - Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America*, Chapters 7-9

Week 12 (March 30 and April 1): The Black Feminist Critique

- Tuesday: Black Nationalism and Black masculinity
 - Farah Jasmine Griffin, "'Ironies of the Black Saint': Malcolm X, Black Women, and the Price of Protection"
- Thursday: The Combahee River Collective and the original intersectionality
 - Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "Until Black Women Are Free, None of Us Are Free"

Week 13 (April 6 and 8): Mass Incarceration and the Making of our Moment

- Tuesday: Mass Incarceration
 - Begin Patrisse Khan-Cullors and asha bandele, *When They Call You A Terrorist*
- Thursday: The Struggle for Black Liberation

- Complete Khan-Cullors and bandele, *When They Call You A Terrorist*

Week 14 (April 13 and 15): Black Lives Matter

- The Ferguson uprising
 - Kanopy: *Whose Streets?* (2017)
- Is Black Lives Matter a secular movement?
 - Rahiel Tesfamariam, “How Black Activism Lost Its Religion”

Week 15 (April 20): Where do we go from here?

- Black religions today
 - YouTube: “Reconstructing Hope: Black Religions in the Age of Black Lives Matter”
- Wednesday
 - [Due via Kaltura: Where We’ve Been and What You’ve Learned video essay \(5%\)](#)

April 22 Reading Day

Thursday, April 29 from 1-3pm via OAKS: Unessay Due

May 3 Final Grades Due



Black Lives Matter rally in Boston, MA