

AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION

RELS 270 | TR 9:25-10:40AM | ECTR 219



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. 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 2-3PM** 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 students to the diverse array of religious traditions, cultural formations, and social movements scholars have categorized as

“African American religion.” Students will discuss different definitions of the term as well as survey an array of African and African American religious communities and cultures from the sixteenth century to the present, with special attention to the history of Charleston and the Lowcountry. While much of our time will be devoted to African American Christianity, we will also explore African religions across the Atlantic as well as African American Islam, Judaism, humanism, and other new religious movements. Throughout the semester we will debate key questions for the field, including: What is “African American religion”? What does Africa have to do with African American religions? Why would slaves become Christian and how did they transform Christianity? How did the Great Migrations transform African American religion? Is religion an instrument of or obstacles to Black liberation? What and where is African American religion today?

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:

- Situate African American religions in their historical and cultural context
- Define and historicize “African American religion” as an academic category
- Recognize the importance the SC Lowcountry for African American religions
- Read and think closely, critically, and carefully (or, at least, more than before)
- Employ historical methods to conduct your own religious studies research
- 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 Final Paper.

It also fulfills your Race, Equity, and Inclusion student learning outcomes!

- 1) Students will describe how race is socially constructed and intersects with multiple forms of oppression in US and/or global contexts.
- 2) Students will identify and analyze how social hierarchies manifest in relation to legacies of colonialism, white supremacy or structural oppression in the historical US context.

These outcomes will be assessed in the Primary Source Paper.

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

- **Books**
 - **REQUIRED:** Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (2014)
 - **REQUIRED:** James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (1963)
 - **RECOMMENDED:** Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis* (1944)
 - 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, January 17.**

- ✓ **Participation (20%)** 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.
- ✓ **Quizzes (40%)** You'll take 5 timed, online quizzes (the lowest will be dropped).
- ✓ **Final Paper (35%)** You'll research and write a 6-8 page archival research paper.
 - **Consultation (5%)** with Prof. Cressler by 5PM on Monday, February 27
 - **Annotated Bibliography (10%)** due 11:59PM on Monday, March 20
 - **Introduction Draft (2.5%)** due by 11:59PM on Monday, April 17
 - **Peer Review (2.5%)** completed in class on Tuesday, April 18
 - **Final Paper (15%)** due by 11:59PM on Monday, May 1

Extra Credit

- ✓ You may earn extra credit by attending announced extra credit events. 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. Extra credit will be applied to your quiz grade.

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).

COURSE SCHEDULE [subject to change with advance notice]

WHAT IS "AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION"?

WEEK 1

Thursday, January 12: Who are we and what are we doing?

Commented [MOU1]: Teach short Douglass excerpt as way into "African American religion" as tradition distinct from white religion.

Relay story from the dentist's office (August 2019): "Huh, African American religion. I didn't realize races had their own religions."

WEEK 2

Tuesday, January 17: "Negro religion"

- o **Due via Kaltura: What Makes You You video essay**
- o Reading: W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of the Faith of the Fathers" (1904)

Commented [MOU2]: Teach excerpt of Obama and analyze both words and affect.

Thursday, January 19: Debating definitions of "African American religion"

- o Reading: Eddie Glaude, "Chapter 1: The Category of African American Religion" in *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (2014)

Commented [MOU3]: Lesson on note-taking (in class) and annotation (while reading)

Model and sign up for reading response papers

WHAT DOES AFRICA HAVE TO DO WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION?

WEEK 3

Tuesday, January 24: a very short introduction to African religions

- o Reading: Jacob K. Olupona, "Worldview, Cosmology, and Myths of Origin" in *African Religions: A Very Short Introduction* (2014)

Commented [CMJ4]: Edward Curtis and Sylvester Johnson, "The Transnational and Diasporic Future of African American Religions in the United States" (2019) [OAKS]

Thursday, January 26: Africans and African religions in America

- o Reading: Glaude, "Chapter 2: Conjure and African American Religion"

Commented [MOU5]: They read Chapter 1, my notes also come from Chapter 2.

Commented [MOU6]: Guest lecture and tour from John Gardner (McLeod), Ista Clarke (Old Slave Mart Museum), or KENNETH DOE? (pastor on a church out on St. Helena Island, born and raised in Burton) → 843-476-9952



WEEK 4

Tuesday, January 31: Black women and the making of African America

- o Film: Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991)

Thursday, February 2: Field trip to the Avery Research Center (*t-minus three months*)

- o Meet at the Avery Research Center (125 Bull St.)

QUIZ #1: Due by 11:59PM Friday, February 3

WHY (AND HOW) WOULD AFRICAN AMERICANS BECOME CHRISTIAN?

WEEK 5

Tuesday, February 7: Uniquely Charleston Tours walking tour of enslavement on campus

- o Reading: Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Our democracy's founding ideals were false..."
- o Meet at the Religious Studies department (4 Glebe St.)

Thursday, February 9: Christian slavery and white supremacy

- o Reading: Katharine Gerbner, "From Christian to White" (2018)

Commented [MOU7]: Teach Virginia Slave Laws in class.

Saturday, February 11: Extra Credit Field Trip to McLeod Plantation

WEEK 6

Tuesday, February 14: Becoming Christian, changing Christianity

- o Reading: Glaude, "Chapter 3: African American Christianity (1760-1863)"

Commented [MOU8]: Teach Francis Le Jeau

Thursday, February 16: Field Trip to Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church

- o Reading: Richard Allen, "Life Experience and Gospel Labors" (1833) and Jarena Lee, "A Female Preacher Among African Methodists" (1836)

Commented [CMJ9]: PastorEric36@outlook.com
843.319.7931
Eric Manning

- o Meet at Mother Emanuel AME (110 Calhoun St.)

WEEK 7

Tuesday, February 21: Introducing archival research at the Avery (*t-minus 2.5 months*)

- o Meet at the Avery Research Center (125 Bull St.)

Commented [MOU10]: Pastor Kenneth Doe: kcdoe1952@gmail.com; Bethesda christian fellowship St. Helena

Thursday, February 23:

- o Reading: Glaude, "Chapter 4: African American Christianity (1863-1935)"

Commented [CMJ11]: CREATE SCHEDULE BLOCKS FOR RESEARCH VISITS (1.5 HOUR BLOCKS)

WEEKS OF FEBRUARY 28
MARCH 14

QUIZ #2: Due by 11:59PM Friday, February 24

WHO WERE THE BLACK GODS OF THE METROPOLIS?

WEEK 8

Consultation with Prof. Cressler by Monday, February 27 (*t-minus 9 weeks*)

Tuesday, February 28: Religio-racial movements

- o Reading: Judith Weisenfeld, "Introduction" *New World A-Coming* (2016) [OAKS]

Thursday, March 2: African American Islam

- o Reading: Glaude, "Chapter 7: African American Islam"

MARCH 5-11 = SPRING BREAK (WOO!!!)

Saturday, March 11: Extra Credit Field Trip to "Awakening the Ancestors" at the IAAM

WEEK 9

Tuesday, March 14: The Black Gods of the Metropolis, Part 1

- Reading: Arthur Huff Fauset, “I. Negro Religious Cults in the Urban North” and “X. The Negro and His Religion” in *Black Gods of the Metropolis* (1944)

Commented [MOU12]: Breakdown of the category “cult” and the implications Fauset’s work holds for the study of Af Am religion.

Thursday, March 16: The Black Gods of the Metropolis, Part 2

Reading (everyone): Fauset, “VIII. Why the Cults Attract”

Reading (groups): Fauset, “II. Mt. Sinai Holy Church of America, Inc.” (1)
 Fauset, “III. United House of Prayer for All People” (2)
 Fauset, “IV. Church of God (Black Jews)” (3)
 Fauset, “V. Moorish Science Temple of America” (4)
 Fauset, “VI. Father Divine Peace Mission Movement” (5)

QUIZ #3: Due by 11:59PM Friday, March 17

IS RELIGION AN INSTRUMENT OF OR AN OBSTACLE TO AFRICAN AMERICAN LIBERATION?

WEEK 10

Annotated Bibliographies due by 11:59PM Monday, March 20 (t-minus 6 weeks)

Tuesday, March 21: African American Christianity and Black freedom struggles

- Reading: Glaude, “Chapter 5: African American Christianity (1935-1980)”

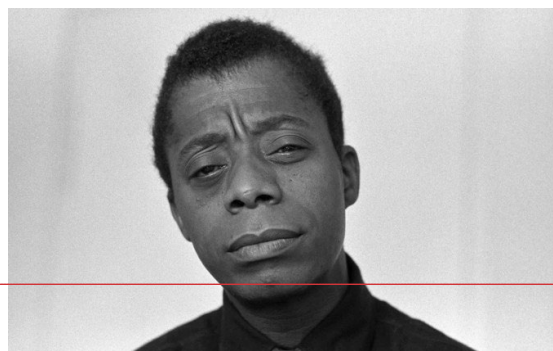
Thursday, March 23:

- Reading: Wallace D. Best, “‘The Right Achieved and the Wrong Way Conquered’: J.H. Jackson, Martin Luther King, and the Conflict Over Civil Rights” (2006)

WEEK 11

Tuesday, March 28: NO CLASS

- Reading: James Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook” (pp. 1-10) and “Down at the Cross” in *The Fire Next Time* (pp. 15-47) (1963)



Commented [MOU13]: Clarify page numbers with different editions.

Thursday, March 30

- Reading: Baldwin, “Down at the Cross” in *The Fire Next Time* (pg. 47-106)

QUIZ #4: Due by 11:59PM Friday, March 31

WHAT AND WHERE IS AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION TODAY?

WEEK 12

Tuesday, April 4: “the Black Church” in the twenty-first century

- Reading: Glaude, “Chapter 6: African American Christianity since 1980”

Thursday, April 6: African American religion in the age of #BlackLivesMatter

- Reading: Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou, "The clergy's place is with the protesters in Ferguson (2015)

WEEK 13

Tuesday, April 11: A religious history of hip hop

- Reading: Josef Sorett, "Believe Me, This Pimp Game is Very Religious: Toward a Religious History of Hip Hop" (2009)

Thursday, April 13: Debating hip hop as African American religion

- Listening: Choose-our-own-Adventure
 - ❖ Beyoncé, *Lemonade* (2016)
 - ❖ Chance the Rapper, *Coloring Book* (2016)
 - ❖ Kendrick Lamar, *DAMN.* (2017)
 - ❖ Your Submissions

WEEK 14

Draft introductions due by 11:59PM Monday, April 17 (t-minus 2 weeks)

Tuesday, April 18: Peer reviewing your draft introductions

- **Homework: bring three hard copies of your draft with you to class.**

Thursday, April 22: Black Humanism

- Video: Anthony Pinn, "African Americans and Practices of Disbelief"

QUIZ #5: Due by 11:59PM Friday, April 23

WEEK 15

Tuesday, April 25: What we've learned, how far we've come...

- Reading: To Be Determined

Thursday, April 27 [Reading Day]

FINAL PAPER: Due via OAKS by 11:59PM on May 1