

AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGIONS

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the study of African American religion. It surveys the history and variety of religion as practiced by Americans of African descent, while giving attention to the social construction of African religion, black religion, and the black church, within the cultural context of the United States. The course also addresses attempts by African Americans to overcome religion, situating these efforts within secular traditions in the United States. The course is organized roughly chronologically, moving from the earliest years of the European-African slave trade and transmission of African cultures to the Americas, to the role of religion during antebellum slavery in the United States, to religious movements during industrialization, and religious restructuring within service economies of the late twentieth century to the present. In addition to numerically dominant Protestant Christianity, the course surveys the presence of Judaism, Catholicism, and Islam within African American religious history.

Course Goal:

By the end of this course, students should be able to think, discuss, and write critically about African American religions from a religious studies perspective. Students should be able to identify a range of African religious traditions within the history of the United States, be able to construct a broad historical narrative of African American religions, and situate contemporary examples of African American religious practice within this narrative.

Prerequisites: None. This course assumes no prior knowledge of the subject.

Required Texts:

Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Suggested Texts:

Yaa Gyasi, *Home Going: A Novel* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017).

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Random House, 2004 [1987]).

Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Additional readings posted on Canvas.

Canvas:

Course information, handouts, assignments, review sheets, etc. will be posted on the class website on Canvas. To find the Canvas site, and go to <http://canvas.utexas.edu/> and log in with your EID and password.

Grading and Course Requirements:

Your grade for the course will be based on the total cumulative points from the following assignments:

1. Participation (30%) - Over the course of the semester, you will have the opportunity to participate in various class discussion exercises. Each exercise will count 2 points and will be graded pass/fail. You will need to successfully complete 15 class exercises for full credit on this assignment. Any additional participation exercises completed beyond the cumulative 30 points are counted as extra credit at up to 0.2 points per journal entry.
2. Reading Journal (40%) – For each assigned reading, you will be given the option of writing a journal entry. Journal entries should briefly answer the reading guide questions posted on Canvas. This assignment requires you to keep a record of your responses to the readings, and helps you sharpen critical thinking and writing skills. Each entry counts up to 2 points. Reading journals should be submitted on Canvas by 10am the day of the given class in which they are assigned. Journal entries must directly answer the questions in your own words. You can quote from the assigned reading, but you must explain or use the quote to demonstrate your own analysis. You can submit as many journals as needed to receive full credit. However, you cannot submit journal entries after the class in which they are assigned. Any additional entries completed beyond the cumulative 40 points are counted as extra credit at up to 0.2 points per journal entry.
3. Final Essay (30%) – This assignment is designed to help you develop critical thinking and writing skills.
 - a. Essay Outline with Thesis Statement Due in Class Mon May 6th (5 points)
 - b. Peer Review in Class – Mon May 6th (5 points)
 - c. Essay Draft Due in Class – Wed May 8th (5 points)
 - d. Peer Review in Class – Wed May 8th (5 points)
 - e. FINAL ESSAY DUE – Mon May 13th by 5pm – Submit on Canvas (10 points)

University of Texas Honor Code and Academic Integrity

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community. If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, or other violations, please feel free to ask me. Students who violate the University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possible failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. The policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For more information, you can talk with me or visit the Student Judicial Services Web site: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sis>.

Use of E-Mail for Official Correspondence to Students

Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, you are responsible for reading your email for university and course-related information and announcements. You are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to your e-mail address. You should check your e-mail regularly and frequently to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-critical. You can find UT Austin's policies and instructions for updating your e-mail address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>.

Accommodations: Documented Disability Statement

If you require special accommodations, you must obtain a letter that documents your disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). Present the letter to me at the beginning of the semester so we can discuss the accommodations you need. No later than five business days before an exam, you should remind me of any testing accommodations you will need. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

Religious Holidays

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Course Schedule:

W Jan 23 - Course overview

A Rap on Race

M Jan 28

In-class film screening: I am Not Your Negro (Raoul Peck, 2016)

W Jan 30

In-class film screening: I am Not Your Negro (Raoul Peck, 2016)

Readings: Selections from Margaret Mead and James Baldwin, *A Rap on Race* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1971).

Racial and Religious Categories

M Feb 4

Readings: “Chapter One: The Category of “African American Religion,” *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (1-15).

W Feb 6

Readings: “Chapter Two: Conjure and African American Religion,” in Glaude, *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (16-32).

Christianity and Slavery

M Feb 11

Readings: “Chapter Three: African American Christianity: The Early Phase (1760-1863),” in Glaude, *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (32-46).

W Feb 13

Readings: Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Slaveholders and the Bible” (Allitt 188-195)

‘Angelina Grimke Uses the Bible to Justify Abolishing Slavery, 1838’ (Allitt: 176-178).

‘Frederick Douglass Compares Southern Slaveowners’ Religion with that of Jesus, 1845’ (Allitt: 179)

‘Thorton Stingfellow Argues that the Bible is Proslavery, 1860’ (Allitt: 180)

Richard Allen – ‘African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1816’ (Gaustad 1: 273-276)

God of the Oppressed

M Feb 18

Readings: “Chapter Four: African American Christianity: The Modern Phase (1863-1935),” in Glaude, *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (47-64).

W Feb 20

Readings: W. E. B. Dubois, “Of the Coming of John,” *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903: 141-164)

Extra Credit Reading: James H. Cone, “Chapter 1: Introduction” and “Chapter 2: Speaking the Truth,” in *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 1-35.

Christianity and White Nationalism

M Feb 25

In-class film screening Rebirth of a Nation (DJ Spooky 2008) (part 1)

W Feb 27

Readings: Richard C. Salter, “The Birth of a Nation as American Myth,” *The Journal of Religion and Film* Vol. 8 (No. 2) (2004).

In-class film screening Rebirth of a Nation (DJ Spooky 2008) (part 2)

Slavery by Another Name

M Mar 4

In-class film screening Slavery by Another Name (PBS, 2012), Part 1

W Mar 6

In-class film screening Slavery by Another Name (PBS, 2012), Part 2

Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century

M Mar 11

Readings: “Chapter Five: African American Christianity: The Modern Phase (1935-1980),” in Glaude, *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (65-79).

W Mar 13

Readings: “Chapter Six: African American Christianity Since 1980 in Glaude, *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (80-95).

Spring Break

M Mar 18 – Spring Break

W Mar 20 – Spring Break

God's Long Summer

M Mar 25

In-class screening: "Freedom Summer" (PBS 2010).

W Mar 27

Readings: Charles Marsh, Chapter Five, "Cleveland Sellers and the River of No Return," *God's Long Summer* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997), 152-191.

In-class screening: "Freedom Summer" (PBS 2010).

Civilities and Civil Rights

M Apr 1

Readings: William Chafe, "Introduction," "The Sit-Ins Begin," "Epilogue for the Paper Edition," *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3-11, 71-102, 251-254.

W Apr 3

Readings: Chad Seales, "Chapter 3: Civility," *The Secular Spectacle: Performing Religion in a Southern Town* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 66-86.

Government Surveillance, Religion, and Civil Rights

M Apr 8

Readings: Lerone Martin, "Bureau Clergyman: How the FBI Colluded with an African American Televangelist to Destroy Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." *Religion and American Culture* (Vol. 28, Issue 1, 2018), 1-51.

W Apr 10

Sylvester Johnson, "Garveyism, Anticolonialism, and State Repression of Black Religions" in *African American Religions, 1500-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 273-324.

M Apr 15

Readings: "Chapter Seven: African American Islam" in Glaude, *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (80-95).

W Apr 17

Readings: Sylvester Johnson, "Black Religion, the Security State, and the Racialization of Islam," in *African American Religions, 1500-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 377-400.

New Muslim Cool

M Apr 22

In-class screening: “New Muslim Cool” (2009).

W Apr 24

Readings: Su’ad Abdul Khabeer, “Chapter 1: The Loop of Muslim Cool: Black Islam, Hip Hop, and Knowledge of the Self,” *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (New York, New York University Press, 2016), 27-76).

In-class screening: “New Muslim Cool” (2009).

Religion and Race Revisited in New Orleans

M Apr 29

In-class screening: Peter Entell, “Shake the Devil Off,” (Show and Tell Films, 2007).

W May 1

Readings: James Bennett, “Catholics, Creoles, and the Redefinition of Race in New Orleans.” In *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas*, edited by Henry Goldschmidt and Elizabeth McAlister, 183–208. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

In-class screening: Peter Entell, “Shake the Devil Off,” (Show and Tell Films, 2007).

M May 6

Essay Outline with Thesis Statement Due in Class

Peer Review in Class

W May 8

Essay Draft Due in Class

Peer Review in Class

Final Essay Due Monday May 13th by 5pm on Canvas