Reli 240-01: African American Religions

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Organized historically, this course introduces you to the variety of African American religions that developed in the Americas during and since the Atlantic slave trade. We will look at the religious traditions, experiences, and communities of African Americans in what is now the United States and in places around the Caribbean World. As such, the historical contexts surrounding the development of African American religions and the lived experiences of African Americans are the main topics of our course. The class includes discussion of West African religions, the impact of the Atlantic slave trade, the role of politics, the construction of racial identities, and most importantly, the diversity of African American religions in both North America and the Caribbean world.

We will cover both African American religions and how those traditions have been written about. For example, we will think about the beliefs and practices of Vodou/Voudou, but we will also investigate the significance and development of the demonization of Vodou.

HOW THIS HELPS YOU GRADUATE

This course is a 200 level Religious Studies course and fulfills one of your graduation requirements.

In combination with your other humanities courses, this class provides an important foundation for your lifelong quest for knowledge. As such, this course will help you further develop your reading and writing skills and your critical thinking skills.
COURSE GOALS

1. For students to learn about various African American religions—from Vodou in Haiti to Methodism in Virginia—and their relevant histories.

2. To investigate the diverse ways in which African American religions are both African and American, and in the process for students to identify how context frames religious practice and belief.

3. To see how religion and race have influenced understandings of the other (and “the other”) in American history and culture.

4. For you to understand the complex interactions between religious belief and practice and the rich historical, social, political, cultural, economic, and intellectual context in which religious people inhabit and live their religion.

5. For students to be able to critically read, historically contextualize, and interpret arguments about religious history and religious studies.

6. For you to enhance and develop your analytical and writing skills.

“To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships.” – W.E.B DuBois

IMPORTANT NOTES

- I do not tolerate plagiarism or cheating. We are an intellectual and academic community, and all of us are responsible to act with integrity. All violations of the Gonzaga Academic Honesty Policy will be reported to your advisor.

- Plagiarism is the act of passing another’s work off as your own. For more see here: http://www.plagiarism.org/ or ask me.

- According to GU’s absence policy, if you miss 6 or more classes, you will automatically fail this course.

- Letter grades will be determined as follows: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 86-89; B: 83-85; B-: 80-82; C+: 76-79; C: 73-75; C-: 70-72; D+: 66-69; D: 63-65; D-: 50-62; F: below 50

COURSE TEXTS


All three texts are required. Additional readings will be uploaded to Blackboard.
Weekly Reflection Papers: Almost every week, you will write a one page (double-spaced) reflection and bring it to class. These reflection papers should be your thoughts about and reactions to your reading. The short paper can be engage one or more of the readings for that week. These will each be worth 50 points, and you will write 8 reflection papers in all. There are 10 due dates for reflection papers listed on the syllabus; you get to skip 2 of those.

Two Exams: There will be both a midterm and a final exam for this class. The exams will consist of two parts: an in-class and a take-home. You will receive a study guide 3 class periods before the exam, that will include an essay prompt. On the day of the exam, you will bring to class a hard copy of your 750 word essay responding to the prompt and turn in an e-copy on blackboard to Turnitin. The in-class portion will be identification and short answer. Each exam is worth 200 points apiece (100 for the in-class portion, 100 for take-home).

Primary Source Worksheets: Over the course of the semester, you will be required to fill out 4 primary source worksheets. The worksheet is due the class period the reading was assigned. Each worksheet will be worth 50 points.

The Fire Next Time Paper: This will be a 1,000 word paper discussing James Baldwin’s The Fire Next Time. Your paper will address the following questions: How does race and religion relate to each other in the narrative of American history that Baldwin constructs? How does religion function as a literary and political aesthetic in Baldwin’s The Fire Next Time? What does it mean to be religious and how does religion function in America’s racial landscape for Baldwin? This paper will be worth 200 points. You will turn in a hard copy and an e-copy to Turnitin on Blackboard.

Class Participation: The success of the class relies in large part on you. The least boring and most effective way to learn is to participate fully in the process. Since you will spend time reflecting upon the readings in advance of class, you should come prepared to discuss the reading and the additional course material presented in class. This will be worth 200 points.

8 Reflection Papers: 400 points
2 Exams: 400 points
Baldwin Paper: 200 points
Worksheets: 200 points
Participation: 200 points

1400-1260 points: A range
1259-1120 points: B range
1119-980 points: C range
989-840 points: D range
699 and below: F
STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

As a student enrolled in this course, you agree to do the following:

1) **Come to class, on time, and stay for the entire meeting.** Make-up accommodations will only be offered for University approved activities (with documentation), extreme illness (i.e., not allergies or a cold), or family emergency.

2) **Complete assigned readings, in their entirety, on schedule.** You should complete assigned readings by the start of the class meeting.

3) **Contribute to class discussions.** You should come to class with questions and comments, prepared to participate in a lively discussion.

4) **Complete all assignments, in a timely manner.** I will allow extensions for in distressing cases of family emergencies and extreme illness, but they must be asked for in advance. Otherwise late papers will be deducted a full latter grade for every day it is late, starting immediately after the deadline. In other words, if your paper is due at the beginning of class and you turn it in after class, you are already a day late. Mark deadlines and important dates in your calendar, iPhone, etc.

5) **Obey the University Academic Honesty Policy.** Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic violations. The Gonzaga University Academic Honesty Policy outlines the University’s expectations for the integrity of students’ academic work. Each student has the responsibility (1) to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student’s own work, (2) to refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the university community, and (3) to foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the university community. More on the Academic Honesty Policy can be found here: [http://www.gonzaga.edu/campus+resources/Offices+and+Services+A-Z/Registrar/AcademicProgressPoliciesandProcedures.asp#AcademicHonesty](http://www.gonzaga.edu/campus+resources/Offices+and+Services+A-Z/Registrar/AcademicProgressPoliciesandProcedures.asp#AcademicHonesty)

6) **Ask for help when you need it.** I am happy to assist students in their attempts to master course materials and successfully complete course assignments. Come to my office hours and I am always available via email.

COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT

The course is organized into a series of competencies. Each competency is designed to help you master specific skills and knowledge areas. The competencies are:

- Competency 1: Ability to analyze and interpret data
- Competency 2: Ability to communicate effectively
- Competency 3: Ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations

The competencies are assessed through a series of assignments and projects. You will be given feedback on your progress and opportunities to improve.

COURSE POLICIES

**Americans with Disabilities Act Policy:** Students with disabilities who need academic accommodations should:

1. Register with and provide documentation to the **Disability Resources, Education, & Access Management Center (DREAM).**
2. Bring a letter to the instructor from DREAM indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done within the first two weeks of class.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request for students requiring accommodations.

COURSE POLICIES

Lastly, this is a course in religious studies and not confessional in nature; that is, we are not here to promote a particular religious viewpoint or to debate religious “truth.” Rather, we will be engaging religious materials as historians, anthropologists, and sociologists in order to understand their meanings for the people who have produced and used them. You may have your own religious commitment; if so, throughout this course you will likely encounter opinions and religious beliefs and activities with which you do not agree. I ask you to imagine yourself in the shoes of someone else whose practices and beliefs may differ from your own and yet carry immense meaning and value for that person. If your personal religious commitment is causing you to have difficulties doing this, please feel free to discuss it with me privately.

Furthermore, students will be expected to communicate in a civil manner at all times, both in and out of the classroom. This means that interactions are to be carried out in a polite, courteous, and dignified way. Treat your peers and the subject material with respect and understanding.

COURSE SCHEDULE

**Important:** You need to come to class having already read the assigned reading for that day; in other words, readings are due the date listed.

**Week 1:** Course Introduction
- **Wednesday, Sept 3:** Syllabus; Class Expectations
- **Friday, Sept 5:** Religion, Race, and Colonialism
  - Reading: “Anchoring Religion in the World” on blackboard

**Week 2:** Studying the Study of African American Religions
- **Monday, Sept 8:** What’s African about African American religions?
  - Reading: “Death of the African Gods” on blackboard
- **Wednesday, Sept 10:** Are African American Religions Diasporic?
  - Reading: “What is Diasporic Religion?” on blackboard
- **Friday, Sept 12:** What’s American about African American religions?
  - Reading: “Religion Proper and Proper Religion” on blackboard

**Reflection Paper Due This Week**

**Week 3:** Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade
- **Monday, Sept 15:** Religions in West and Central Africa
  - Reading: “Traditional Ibo Religion and Culture” and “African Religions in Colonial Jamaica” in DW
- **Wednesday, Sept 17:** The Atlantic Slave Trade
  - Reading: “Praying the ABCs” in FB
- **Friday, Sept 19:** Conversion
  - Reading: “Slave Conversion on the Carolina Frontier” and “Address to the Negroes in the state of New York” in DW

**Reflection Paper Due This Week**

**Week 4:** Protestantism and Slave Religion
- **Monday, Sept 22:** Slave Religion Rhetoric
- **Wednesday, Sept 24:** Black in a White Church
  - Reading: “How Far the Promised Land?” in FB; “Plantation Churches” in DW
- **Friday, Sept 26:** No class, Labor Day.

**Week 5:** Resisting White Christianity
- **Monday, Sept 29:** Cuban Santería and Haitian Vodou
  - Reading: “Of Worlds Seen and Unseen” on blackboard
- **Wednesday, Oct 1:** Haitian Vodou
  - Reading: “Haitian Zombies” on blackboard
- **Thursday, Oct 2:** Being Religious Interreligiously Lecture, 7pm
  - Lecture sponsored by the Department of Religious Studies.
  - Extra credit opportunity with a 300 word reflection.
- **Friday, Oct 3:** Slave Religion and Resistance in the South
  - Reading: “Religion and Slave Insurrection” and “Slave Songs and Spirituals” in DW

**Reflection Paper Due This Week**
**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week 6:** Black Church in and outside a White Church

**Monday, Oct 6:** Segregation
- Reading: “Protesting the ‘Negro Pew,’” “Black Churches in New York City, 1840,” and “Our Wretchedness in Consequence of the Preachers of Religion” in DW

**Wednesday, Oct 8:** The African Methodist Episcopal Church
- Reading: “Richard Allen and the African Church Movement” in FB

**Friday, Oct 10:** The AME
- Reading: “Life Experiences and Gospel Labors” and “A Female Preacher among the African Methodists” in DW

**Reflection Paper Due This Week**

**Midterm Study Guide Distributed**

**Week 7:** Abolition (and Midterm)

**Monday, Oct 13:** Calls for Abolition
- Reading: “Slaveholding Religion and the Christianity of Christ,” “I Will Not Live a Slave,” and “Welcome to the Ransomed” in DW

**Wednesday, Oct 15:** Review

**Friday, Oct 17:** Midterm

**Week 8:** Black Catholicism

**Monday, Oct 20:** No class, Founder’s Day.

**Wednesday, Oct 22:** Black Catholicism
- Reading: “The First African American Catholic Congress” in DW

**Friday, Oct 24:** Black Catholicism
- Reading: “Minority within a Minority,” Prologue, and Epilogue “A Fire in the Bones” in FB

**Reflection Paper Due This Week**

**Week 9:** American Alternatives to Christianity

**Monday, Oct 27:** Muslims in the Early South
- Reading: “Muslims in Early America” on blackboard

**Wednesday, Oct 29:** Conjure and Hoodoo
- Reading: “Conjuration and Witchcraft” in DW

**Friday, Oct 31:** Spiritualism
- Reading: “Cercle Harmonique” on blackboard

**Reflection Paper Due This Week**

**Week 10:** Outside the Black Church

**Monday, Nov 3:** The Great Migration
- Reading: “Address on the Great Migration,” “Organized Religion and the Cults,” and “Elder Lucy Smith” in DW

**Wednesday, Nov 5:** Father Divine and Black Judaism
- Reading: “The Realness of God, to you-wards ...” and “Black Judaism in Harlem” in DW

**Friday, Nov 7:** The Moorish Science Temple
- Reading: “MST FBI files” on blackboard

**Reflection Paper Due This Week**
ONLINE RESOURCES FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGIONS AND CULTURE


The Malcolm X Project at Columbia University

The Gospel Music History Archive at the University of Southern California

African American Christianity, Part 1: To the Civil War, National Humanities Center

African American Christianity, Part 2, National Humanities Center

Islam in America: From African Slaves to Malcolm X, National Humanities Center

Archives of African American Music and Culture, Indiana University Image Collections Online

Civil Rights in Florida, Florida Memory

African American Digital Collections, Library of Congress

American Missionary Association in Louisiana, Tulane University

BlackPast.org, online reference guide of African American history

The Church in the Southern Black Community, University of North Carolina’s Documenting the American South

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 11: Jim Crow and Civil Rights

Monday, Nov 10: The Black Church
   Reading: “The Black Church” in FB; and “Of the Faith of the Fathers” in DW

Wednesday, Nov 12: The Long Civil Rights Movement
   Reading: “Things of the Spirit,” “The Genius of the Negro Church,” and “Marcus Garvey Tells His Own Story” in DW

Friday, Nov 14: The Long Civil Rights Movement
   Reading: “A Hidden Wholeness” in FB; and “Letter from Birmingham Jail” in DW

Reflection Paper Due This Week

Week 12: Politics and Power

Monday, Nov 17: Nation of Islam
   Reading: Begin FNT; and “Self-Government in the New World” in DW

Wednesday, Nov 19: The Fire Next Time Discussion
   Reading: Finish FNT

Friday, Nov 21: No class. Dr. Clark will away for a conference.

Week 13: No Class.

Monday, Nov 24: No class. Dr. Clark will be away for a conference.

Fire Next Time Paper Due Monday Nov 24 to Blackboard by 3:10pm

Wednesday, Nov 26: No class, Thanksgiving break.

Friday, Nov 28: No class, Thanksgiving break.

Week 14: Politics and Power

Monday, Dec 1: After Civil Rights
   Reading: “The Anatomy of Segregation and Ground of Hope” and “The Black Churches” in DW

Wednesday, Dec 3: God is Black
   Reading: “Black Power Statement” and “Black Theology and the Black Church” in DW

Friday, Dec 5: The Black Church and the 2008 Presidential Race
   Reading: Jeremiah Wright’s speech “Confusing God and Government” and Obama’s 2008 speech “Race in America” on blackboard

Reflection Paper Due This Week

Final Exam Study Guide distributed

Week 15: TBA and Review

Monday, Dec 8: TBA
   Reading: TBA

Wednesday, Dec 10: TBA
   Reading: TBA

Friday, Dec 12: Review

Reflection Paper Due This Week

Finals Exam: Tuesday, December 16, 10:30am—12:30pm