Course Name: African American Religion
Course Number: REL/HST 372
Credits: 4
Instructor Name: Dr. Youssef J. Carter
Instructor email: cartery@oregonstate.edu

Course Description
This course introduces students to the history of African American religious experience in the United States from the colonial era to the present. We will examine African influences on black American religions, the presence of Conjure or hoodoo, the politics of Christianity in slave times, the growth of the independent black Methodist and Baptist churches, black women’s religious leadership, and flowering of new religious movements among African Americans during the Great Migration. We will also study the role of religion in the civil rights and black consciousness movements, and explore in detail the growth of the Nation of Islam during this period. Finally, we will look at the recent roles of Black religions in contemporary U.S. politics and African American life. As we do, we will search for changes and continuities in black American religious experiences, and seek to understand how African American religions have shaped and have been shaped by the social, political, and economic circumstances in which African-American persons of faith have found themselves.

Required Texts

Note: All other readings will be made available on Canvas

Canvas: Our Classroom
Canvas is our classroom. The tone for the course’s on-line environment should be professional and business-like. When writing an email, for example, always use a salutation. Make it clear whom you are addressing and why you are writing. Be respectful. Imagine that you are working with others in a hospital or law firm, and communicate with everyone in our class accordingly. The Calendar section of Canvas is helpful. It will tell you what you need to do and it will contain links to the other sections of our class site. You should feel free to send the whole class a Message when you need help with something or a question is unclear. You are also welcome to post thoughts, comments, and questions in the Chat Room. I will send you Announcements. Please make sure that you read them in whatever email account Canvas has on record for you.

Course Requirements
Course requirements will consist of class discussion submissions (50%), quizzes (20%), and 2,500-word or more final exam essay (30%). The final paper must follow the writing conventions outlined in Appendix 1.

Student Learning Outcomes
1. Analyze the complex interaction between African American religious beliefs and the political, social, economic, cultural, intellectual, and familial context in which have African Americans inhabited and enacted their faith.
2. Demonstrate the ability to read, contextualize, and interpret arguments made by historians and anthropologists.
3. Analyze African American religious traditions in their historical and contemporary contexts.
4. Employ vocabulary appropriate to specific religious traditions throughout the African American historical experience.

**BACC Core**
This class is intended for undergraduate students from every college and major/program. The class fulfills the “Difference, Power, and Discrimination” requirement for your undergraduate education. This means that within this class you will:
1. Explain how difference is socially constructed
2. Using historical and contemporary examples, describe how perceived differences, combined with unequal distribution of power across economic, social, and political institutions, result in discrimination
3. Analyze ways in which the interactions of social categories, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and age, are related to difference, power, and discrimination in the United States.

**Evaluation of Student Performance**

- 30% - Class Participation
- 15% - Reading Quizzes
- 25% - Site Visit Essay
- 30% - Final Exam

**Class Participation (30%)**

A substantial portion of your grade will be earned by participating in weekly discussions. This is where you process the significant amount of material you are reading and viewing each week, and this is also where you help each other master both the content and the meaning of the material.

Extensive directions for this assignment are available on Canvas, but here’s a quick overview: Each week you will write two posts: one “answer post” and one “response post” (in which you respond to one of your classmates’ answer posts). You will address specific prompts, and the answer posts will be between 250 and 350 words, whereas the response posts will be between 150 and 250 words. Effective answers to the discussion questions will be substantial; you should think of these as mini-essays. Answer the questions by offering thoughtful interpretations based on your reading/viewing, and include specific examples and evidence for points that you make. As with an essay assignment, you should include citations (MLA style), and you should proofread prior to submission.

Discussion Board submissions are the on-line equivalent of in-class discussion; they give you a chance to process the course material and analyze the readings, and they give me a chance to
evaluate your grasp of the material and guide you in interpreting the meaning of the events and the ideas of the past. This is the place (other than course design and evaluating your essays) where I will do most of the “teaching” in this course, as I respond to your discussions, so it is important that you participate actively and to the best of your ability and that you include the Discussion Board, including my feedback, as part of your weekly reading – I will generally respond to the discussion by the beginning of the following week and at other times as I see necessary to correct misinterpretations, elaborate on points, or provide additional information.

Reading Quizzes (15%)

• Each week you will take either one or two quizzes.

• Each quiz will have 8 - 10 questions.

• Each of these questions will be either multiple choice or true/false

• You will have 15 minutes to take each of the quizzes.

• Each week, the quizzes will be due on Thursday at 11:59 pm. On a week where you have two quizzes, I recommend taking the quizzes on different days.

Site visit Essay (25%)

At some point during the semester, you will choose a place of worship to visit that serves predominantly African-Americans. You will make two visits to this location. After completing your second visit, you will write an essay about some aspect of your observations and experience. In your essay you must:

• Identify the name of the location you visited, as well as the dates of your two visits.

• Focus on a specific aspect of what you observed (rather than a list of facts about the institution).

• Have a thesis.

• Employ the theory of Black Religion as a lens to analyze what you observed. This means you will draw upon and cite specific parts of relevant readings that speak to this.

• Use related readings to offer context about the religion you are observing in action. This means you will draw upon and cite specific parts of the readings you chose.

• Use MLA style to cite your sources both in the text and in a works cited at the end of the paper.
Please see Canvas for a list of guidelines for approaching a site visit, as well as the rubric I’ll use for grading the assignment.

**Final Exam (30%)**
The final essay will test your understanding of the individual course readings, as well as your ability to synthesize ideas from the readings. The exam will be comprised of two short essays, both of which you write at home and submit via Canvas. You will receive four questions and choose two that you would like to write about. In total, you will write between 1800 and 2300 words.

I will give you your specific questions one week before the final is due, but, from the start of the class, you can find the directions for the exam on Canvas.

**Plagiarism and Cheating**
All of the writing that you do in this class must be your own. Do not cut and paste words from the internet and do not copy someone else’s words. That includes words from our textbooks. This class has a zero tolerance policy on plagiarism. Plagiarism is the use of another person’s words, ideas, etc., without attribution. So whenever you take words from or whenever your ideas or expressions have been shaped by another author or source, you must make it clear somehow that these are not your words. Plagiarism is the chief offense in academic writing, and a finding of plagiarism can result in an F for the course and notification of the appropriate authorities.

**Grading Scale and Late Penalties**
The grading scale for our class is as follows: A, 93-100; A-, 90-92; B+, 88-89; B, 83-87; B-, 80-82; C+, 78-79; C, 73-77; C-, 70-72; D+, 68-69; D, 63-67; D-, 60-62; F, 59 and below. If you turn in any assignment late, there is a 5% penalty the first day and then an additional 10% penalty per day thereafter. Extensions are available only in cases of serious illness or another legitimate excuse, all of which must be documented with a health care professional’s note or the like.

**Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities:** Accommodations for students with disabilities are determined and approved by Disability Access Services (DAS). If you, as a student, believe you are eligible for accommodations but have not obtained approval please contact DAS immediately at 541-737-4098 or at http://ds.oregonstate.edu. DAS notifies students and faculty members of approved academic accommodations and coordinates implementation of those accommodations. While not required, students and faculty members are encouraged to discuss details of the implementation of individual accommodations.

**Student Conduct Expectations:** http://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/code

**Course Outline**
Assigned readings are to be completed by the date under which they are listed. While all syllabi are tentative and subject to change, we will attempt to adhere to this schedule as closely as possible.

**Note:** Please read the Syllabus—carefully!


Module 1: The African-ness of African American Religions

Week 1  West African Religious Traditions
How, when, and where was Catholicism practiced by enslaved Africans in the Americas? How and where were African traditional religions practiced by enslaved Africans in the Americas? When and why did Protestantism begin to be practiced by North American black people? Which Protestant denominations were more popular and why? What role did Islam play in the religious landscape among enslaved Africans? What explains its presence among the enslaved?

Reading: Canaan Land, Ch. 1; “Servants of Allah” (Diouf), Ch. 1

Module 2: African American Religions in Slave Times

Week 2  Independent African American Churches
What is the AME Church? How, why, and when did it begin? How did it grow? Who was Henry Highland Garnet and why was he important? How did African American women participate in the life of black churches in the United States? Ethics are the not only the morals and values by which individuals behave; ethics are also the morals and values by which societies govern and rule themselves. What were the principle ethical concerns of African American churches in the antebellum era of U.S. history?

Jarena Lee converted to Christianity, but then felt enormous dread and anxiety. Eventually, she experienced sanctification. What is that, and how did she experience it? What challenges did Jarena Lee face as she answered the call to be a preacher? How did she eventually become a preacher?

Reading: Canaan Land, Ch. 2; The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee (Jarena Lee), 27-48

Module 3: The Invisible Institution

Week 3  Slave Religions
Describe the presence of religious diversity among enslaved U.S. black communities. The material/aesthetic dimension of religion consists of sacred or religiously meaningful objects, special clothes, sacred sounds, sacred art, sacred spaces, and sacred substances. Describe three different aesthetic elements of slave religion. Why was African American religion in the United States different from African American religion in Latin America and the Caribbean?

Describe how Sister Kelly got religion. The interviewee in “A Voice Rang in my Soul” talks about being “killed dead.” What does that mean? What happened? What were the religious visions of the preacher from a God-fearing plantation?

How does William Adams use the Bible to explain exorcism? What kinds of charms might people use to ward off misfortune, according to William Adams? How does it work? According to Jim Finn, how do you call up the devil, and why did Jim Finn do it?
**Reading:** Canaan Land, Ch. 3; Sister Kelly, “Proud of that ‘Ole Time’ Religion;” “A Voice Rang in my Soul,” “Preacher from a ‘God-Fearing’ Plantation;”; William Adams, “Narrative,” Jim Finn, “Jim Finn on Calling Up the Devil,” (On Canvas)

*Note: Some of the readings are rare oral history interviews with ex-slaves. Some are of poor print quality. I am sorry about that. In addition, some of these interviewees use colloquial rather than standard English. I recommend that you read the text out loud when you encounter difficult passages.*

**Week 4 Holy Struggles for Liberation & Abolitionism**
What is Raboteau’s argument about whether slave religion led to rebellion or docility? Explain one piece of evidence that he uses to make his case. Explain a second piece of evidence that he uses to make his case. What is Jones’ argument about the political implications and consequences of slave religion? Explain one piece of evidence that he uses to make his case. Explain a second piece of evidence that he uses to make his case.

Why is slavery the cause of the “wretchedness” of black people, according to David Walker? How does Walker use the Bible to help prove his claims? How do the “preachers of Jesus Christ” contribute to the conditions of black people? What will God do to America, according to Walker?


**Module 4: African American Religions after the Civil War**

**Week 5 Emancipations and the Limits of Freedom**
How did religious institutions and leaders contribute to the education of free people after the Civil War? Which African American churches grew after the Civil War? How much did they grow? Where did they grow? What was the “redemption of Africa”? Who advocated it? What were its outcomes? What was the “mission of the darker races”? Who advocated it?

**Reading:** Canaan Land, Ch. 4

**Week 6 Black Baptist Women: The Double Struggle/ Race, Class, Gender & Religion**
Who were Lucy Wilmot Smith, Virginia Broughton, and Mary Cook? How did they interpret the Bible to give credence to the idea, on the one hand, that women should embrace their roles as mothers, and the idea, on the other hand, that women should be missionaries and public leaders? Be specific and discuss at least two Bible stories to illustrate your answer. How did these women conceive their role in the uplift and empowerment of the race?

What is respectability? What kinds of behavior were expected of a respectable black Baptist woman? What is Higginbotham’s argument about the question of whether these women were resisting racism, sexism, and classism? (You can also consider information from the last reading.) What was the position of the Woman’s Convention on the debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois over the question of how best to achieve black empowerment?

**Reading:** Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “Feminist Theology, 1880-1900,” 120-149; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “The Politics of Respectability,” 185-229, on Canvas
**Module 5: African American Religions and the Black Freedom Struggle**

**Week 7  The Warmth of Other Suns**
How did northern African American churches respond to the Great Migration? What were the religious elements of the UNIA? What new religious movements were born during the Great Migration? What religious innovations were there in African American religious music during the Great Migration?

What was special about the way that William J. Seymour taught about speaking in tongues? What happened at the Azusa Street revival? How did Charles H. Mason come to found the nation’s leading black Pentecostal denomination, the Church of God in Christ (COGIC)?

Who was Howard Thurman and what did he accomplish? What religious ethics and doctrines were important to the civil rights movement? What is Black Theology?

**Reading:** Canaan Land, Ch. 5 and 6; James Tinney, “William J. Seymour: Father of Modern-Day Pentecostalism” and Elsie W. Mason, “Bishop C. H. Mason, Church of God in Christ,” (Canvas)

**Module 6: Abolition Ethics in the Civil Rights Era**

**Week 8  Black Christian Reason**
What role did Black Churches play in the Civil Rights Movement? How was Dr. King’s interpretation of the Bible different from a broader American interpretation at that time? What explains this difference? What religious vision did Dr. King have? What was his critique of the moderate White Christian community?

**Reading:** “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; “Upon This Rock: The Black Church, Nonviolence, and the Civil Rights Movement,” Allison Calhoun-Brown; “Jesus, He’s My Brother: The Black Church, Black Theology, and the Black Freedom Struggle in Americus” (Chapter 3 in God With Us)

**Week 9  Islam and Black Religion**

How was Nation of Islam religious doctrine similar to and different from Sunni and Shi’a Islam? What happened after Elijah Muhammad died? How did the Nation of Islam change? What stayed the same? What is the legacy of the Nation of Islam, in your opinion?

In what ways has Islam been appropriated by African Americans historically? Why was this done and what are the contributing factors to a localized interpretation of Islam in the United States? Why were African American women overwhelmingly drawn to the Nation of Islam? What was its appeal?


**Module 7: Contemporary Black Religions**
Week 10  The Transnational Future of Christianity, Islam and Orisha-Based Religion

How has the immigration of Africans to the United States changed the face of the “Black Church”? How have African American Christians influenced the practice of Christianity abroad? Compare and contrast theological conservatism and liberalism in African American Christianity.

How have African American Muslims conceived of themselves as part of a larger, more global community? How has the presence of African-born Muslims in the United States altered the practice of Islam in America? When and how did the number of Orisha-oriented religious practitioners begin to grow again in the United States? What groups were represented among them? Why might practitioners find Orisha-based religions attractive?


FINAL EXAM DUE: TBD

Below are examples of possible Final Essay Questions:

1. Write a history of African American women’s religion, examining their experiences in the era of slavery, Jim Crow, the Great Migration, and the era of civil rights after the Second World War. Identify a common theme or two in their stories, and trace that theme(s) through the last two centuries of their religious lives. But be sure to show the differences among them, as well, highlighting their rich and diverse religious cultures and experiences and views.

   Your thesis might say something like the following: “I argue that African American women’s religions [here you explain what the common theme is]. Here, I show the diverse ways that [and here you explain how the paper is organized to prove your point, and what comes first, second, third, etc.]

   OR

   2. Show how, over the last two centuries, African American religious persons, groups, ideas, and practices have been a part of the African American struggle for political liberation, freedom, equality, and self-determination. Be sure to identify some common elements shared by African American religionists, but also highlight their differences.

   You must include evidence from the era of slavery, Jim Crow, the Great Migration, and the era of civil rights after the Second World War.

   Your thesis might say something like the following: “I argue that African American religions have contributed to the struggle for Black liberation by [and here you say how exactly religion has contribute to this struggle.] I will prove this by [and here you explain how the paper is organized to prove your point, and what comes first, second, third, etc.]

APPENDIX 1: Writing Conventions
Format

Essays should be double-spaced, written in a standard twelve point font, have margins no larger than 1.25 inches, contain page numbers, and include a separate title page. The title should read like the headline of a movie review found in the newspaper.

Use only our readings as sources. All quotations should be cited using the MLA system. An example of this system is: Smith argues that the “most important course one can take at IUPUI is a religious studies course” (Smith 25). Please note where the quotation marks, the parentheses, and the period are placed. No bibliography is required.

Writing

The Introduction: The opening paragraph must have a thesis and explain how the paper is organized to prove this argument. The most pedestrian way to write a thesis statement is to say something like: “In this paper I argue that . . .” Several detailed sentences following the thesis should explain how the paper will prove it. Give your reader a map that he or she can use to anticipate the rest of the journey.

Lay out your entire argument in the introduction. A good piece of expository prose is not a mystery novel; there is no need to keep the reader in suspense.

The Body: Each paragraph in the body should use a topic sentence that explains to the reader how the argument is being advanced and proven. Topic sentences should also flow easily from the previous paragraph, offering the reader a clear transition. Often times, the final sentence of a paragraph can provide a summarizing transition that explains what has been shown or proven in the paragraph, readying the reader to move on to the next point in the argument. Regarding the handling of evidence, quotations should be used carefully: never simply state the quoted material; always introduce it by naming its author and by stating any relevant information about when and where the idea was first used; and always tell the reader what one should learn from the quote and how it pertains to the main idea of the paragraph. In addition, properly document the source of information and ideas, taking special care to avoid plagiarism. A general rule of thumb: if there is any question about whether a source should be cited, then cite it. To fully document your paper, you must identify the source of any indirect or direct quotation, any fact that is not common knowledge, or any fact about which there is a dispute.

The Conclusion: In this final part of the essay, the author should highlight the most compelling evidence and logic from the body of the paper and review the steps taken to show how the argument is correct. In addition, the writer should raise any unanswered questions, thereby lending credibility to the scope of the argument and the prudence of its author.