

Readings in African American Religious History
Prof. Vaughn A. Booker

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Course Description

A focus on Black cultural production and its producers enriches African American religious history. Seminar participants will engage the theoretical concerns and methodological approaches that illuminate the ways that Black women and men capture and (re)shape the meaning of their worlds in a variety of domestic, professional, social, and political settings. The seminar's primary aims are to help participants define interests

within the field to pursue further study, to consider potential areas of research, and to aid preparation for doctoral examinations.

Course Requirements

1. **Weekly reading responses (at least 300 words) and class participation**
2. **Student presentation of a week's secondary book selection (30 min)**
 - ✚ = Week's main reading
 - ❖ = Student presentation reading (**students are responsible for 1 per semester**)
3. **Cultural Artifact Analysis:** Seminar participants will produce a **short analysis paper (4-5 pages) on their selection** of a cultural production that centers religion. **Material culture:** architectural space, land/cityscape, attire; **Visual culture:** photography, visual art, film; **Auditory culture:** sermons, music, speeches. **Literary culture:** scripts, plays, poetry, short stories. **Performance:** dance, procession, parade.
4. **Culminating Assignment (3 options)**
 - A. **Theory and Methods Paper** on Researching Black Religion and Culture
 - B. **Historiography Paper** on a topic within Black Religion and Culture
 - C. Expansion of Cultural Artifact Analysis into **journal article-length Research Paper**

Course Itinerary

Week 1 (Jan 23) – Scope, Concepts, Frontiers

- ✚ Jason R. Young, "African and African American Religions in the Early Americas," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Race in American History*, Paul Harvey and Kathryn Gin Lum, eds. (2018)
- ✚ Lerone Martin, "Religion, Race, and Popular Culture," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Race in American History*, Paul Harvey and Kathryn Gin Lum, eds. (2018)
- ✚ Yvonne Chireau, Ch. 5, "We All Believed in Hoodoo," *Conjure and Black American Cultural Traditions*, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (2003)
- ✚ Judith Weisenfeld, "Invisible Women: On Women and Gender in the Study of African American Religious History," *Journal of Africana Religions* 1.1 (2013): pp. 133-149. <<https://muse-jhu-edu.proxy.library.upenn.edu/pub/2/article/493661>>.
- ✚ Ahmad Greene-Hayes, "'Queering' African American Religious History," *Religion Compass* (2019) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12319>>.

Week 2 (Jan 30) – Revising Assumptions about Culture

- ✚ Alexis S. Wells-Oghoghomeh, *The Souls of Womenfolk: The Religious Cultures of Enslaved Women in the Lower South* (2021)
- ❖ Ras Michael Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (2012)

Week 3 (Feb 6) – Nations within (and beyond) Nations I

- ✚ **Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (2016)**
- ❖ J. T. Roane, *Dark Agoras: Insurgent Black Social Life and the Politics of Place* (2023)

Week 4 (Feb 13) – Auditory Culture I: Sermonic Arts

- ✚ **Lerone Martin, *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (2014)**
- ❖ Terri Brinegar, *Voices of Black Folk: The Sermons of Reverend A. W. Nix* (2022)
- Gerald Davis, *The Performed Word* (1982) (<https://www.folkstreams.net/film-detail.php?id=194>)

Week 5 (Feb 20) – Auditory Culture II: Jazz, Religion, Spirituality

- ✚ **Vaughn A. Booker, *Lift Every Voice and Swing: Black Musicians and Religious Culture in the Jazz Century* (2020)**
- ❖ Richard Brent Turner, *Soundtrack to a Movement: African American Islam, Jazz, and Black Internationalism* (2021)

Week 6 (Feb 27) – Auditory Culture III: The Gospel Music Tradition [HAROLD VISIT]

- ✚ **Claudrena N. Harold, *When Sunday Comes: Gospel Music in the Soul and Hip-Hop Eras* (2020)**
- ❖ Mark Burford, *Mahalia Jackson and the Black Gospel Field* (2019)

Week 7 (Mar 5) – Spring Break (NO CLASS)

Week 8 (Mar 12) – Material Culture: Objects and Spaces (Built and Bought)

- ✚ **Colleen McDannell, Ch. 1, “Material Christianity,” and Ch. 2, “Piety, Art, Fashion: The Religious Object,” in *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (1995)**
- ✚ **John Giggie, Ch. 4, “The Material Culture of Religion,” in *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915* (2007)**
- ✚ **Michelle Mitchell, Ch. 6, “The Colored Doll is a Live One! Material Culture, Black Consciousness, and Cultivation of Intra-racial Desire,” *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (2004)**
- ✚ **Anne C. Loveland and Otis B. Wheeler, Ch. 3, “The Auditorium Church,” Ch. 4, “The Multipurpose Church,” and Ch. 5, “Building for Mass Evangelism,” in *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch: A Material and Cultural History* (2003)**
- ✚ **Karla Goldman, Ch. 9, “This is the Gateway to the Lord: The Legacy of Synagogue Buildings for African American Churches on Cincinnati’s Reading Road,” in Yvonne Chireau and Nathaniel Deutsch, eds., *Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism* (Oxford, 2000), 187-202.**
- ❖ Grey Gundaker and Judith McWillie, *No Space Hidden: The Spirit of African American Yard Work* (2005)

Week 9 (Mar 19) – Space, Migration, Creation

- ✚ **Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (2005)**
- ❖ Jerma Jackson, *Singing in My Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age* (2004)

Week 10 (Mar 26) – (Tele)Visual Culture

- ✚ **Judith Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film, 1929-1949* (2007)**
- ❖ Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (2008)

Week 11 (Apr 2) – Playwrights, Production, Piety

- ✚ **Wallace D. Best, *Langston's Salvation: American Religion and the Bard of Harlem* (2017)**
- ❖ Craig R. Prentiss, *Staging Faith: Religion and African American Theater from the Harlem Renaissance to World War II* (2013)

Week 12 (Apr 9) – (Public) Visual Culture as Resistance

- ✚ **Caroline Goesser, Ch. 6, “[Religion as ‘Power Site of Cultural Resistance,’](#)” *Picturing the New Negro: Harlem Renaissance Print Culture and Modern Black Identity* (2007)**
- ✚ **Kymberly N. Pinder, *Painting the Gospel: Black Public Art and Religion in Chicago* (2016)**
- ❖ *Beholding Christ and Christianity in African American Art*, ed. James Romaine and Phoebe Wolfskill (2017)

Week 13 (Apr 16) – OFFICE HOURS MEETINGS TO DISCUSS CULMINATING ASSIGNMENT

Week 14 (Apr 23) – Nations within (and beyond) Nations II

- ✚ **Selections from Tracey E. Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (2012)**
- ❖ Bruce D. Haynes, *The Soul of Judaism: Jews of African Descent in America* (2018)

Week 15 (Apr 30) – Broadcasting Televisual Religious Culture

- ✚ **Marla Frederick, *Colored Television: American Religion Gone Global* (2015)**
- ❖ Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (2016)

Additional Resource List

- Jason Bivins, *Spirits Rejoice: Jazz and American Religion* (2015)
- Randall K. Burkett and David W. Wills, “African-American Religious History, 1919-1939: Bibliographic Essay and Resource Guide” (1986)
<<https://www3.amherst.edu/~aardoc/Biblio.html>>
- William Clites, *Sun Ra's Chicago: Afrofuturism and the City* (2020)

- Gerald Davis, *I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know: A Study of the Performed African American Sermon* (1985)
- Walter F. Pitts, Jr., *Old Ship of Zion: The Afro-Baptist Ritual in the African Diaspora* (1993)
- Lindsay Reckson, *Realist Ecstasy: Religion, Race, and Performance in American Literature* (2020)
- *Women's Work: An Anthology of African-American Women's Historical Writings from Antebellum America to the Harlem Renaissance*, Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp and Kathryn Lofton, eds. (2010)

Material Culture Studies

- Ater, Renée, *Remaking Race and History: The Sculpture of Meta Warrick Fuller* (2011)
- Dunlap, David W., *From Abyssinian to Zion: A Guide to Manhattan's Houses of Worship* (2004)
- Floyd, Minuette, *A Place to Worship: African American Camp Meetings in the Carolinas* (2018)
- Goldman, Karla, **Ch. 9**, "This is the Gateway to the Lord: The Legacy of Synagogue Buildings for African American Churches on Cincinnati's Reading Road," in Yvonne Chireau and Nathaniel Deutsch, eds., *Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism* (2000), 187-202.
- Griffith, R. Marie, "Body Salvation: New Thought, Father Divine, and the Feast of Material Pleasures," *Religion and American Culture* 11 (2001): 119-153.
- Jordano, Dave, *Articles of Faith: African-American Community Churches in Chicago* (2009)
- Knoblock, Glenn A., *African American Historic Burial Grounds and Gravesites of New England* (2016)
- LeRhonda S. Manigault-Bryant, *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music, and Lived Memory among Gullah/Geechee Women* (2014)
- Miller, Adrian, **Ch. 3**, "From Southern to Soul," and **Ch. 4**, "Fried Chicken and the Integration of Church and Plate," in *Soul Food: The Surprising History of an American Cuisine, One Plate at a Time* (2013)
- Rainville, Lynn, *Hidden History: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia* (2014)
- Thompson, Robert Farris, **Ch. 2**, "The Sign of the Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art and Religion in the Americas," in *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (1983)
- Tipton-Martin, Toni, *The Jemima Code: Two Centuries of African American Cookbooks* (2015)
- Twitty, Michael W., *The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South* (2017)
- Wallach, Jennifer Jensen, Psyche Williams-Forsen, and Rebecca Sharpless, eds., *Dethroning the Deceitful Pork Chop: Rethinking African American Foodways from Slavery to Obama* (2015)
- Anthony J. Stanonis, Ch. 7, "Feast of the Mau Mau: Christianity, Conjure, and the Origins of Soul Food"
- Wilkie, Laurie A., *Creating Freedom: Material Culture and African American Identity at Oakley Plantation, Louisiana, 1840-1950* (2000)
- Williams-Forsen, Psyche, **Ch. 5**, "Say Jesus and Come to Me: Signifying and Church Food," in *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, & Power* (2006)

- Zeller, Ben, Marie Dallam, et al., eds., *Religion, Food, and Eating in North America* (2014)
-Derek S. Hicks, "An Unusual Feast: Gumbo and the Complex Brew of Black Religion"

Photography Books and Visual Studies

- Abernethy, Graeme, *The Iconography of Malcolm X* (2013)
- Berger, Maurice, *For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (2010)
- Cunningham, Michael, and Craig Marberry, *Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats* (2000)
- Goesser, Caroline, **Ch. 6**, "Religion as 'Power Site of Cultural Resistance'," in *Picturing the New Negro: Harlem Renaissance Print Culture and Modern Black Identity* (2007)
- Jordano, Dave, *Articles of Faith: African-American Community Churches in Chicago* (2009)
- Manning Marable, Leith Mullings, and Sophie Spencer-Wood, *Freedom: A Photographic History of the African American Struggle* (2002)
- McDannell, Colleen, *Picturing Faith: Photography in the Great Depression* (2004)
- Rankin, Tom, *Sacred Space: Photographs from the Mississippi Delta* (1993)
- *Beholding Christ and Christianity in African American Art*, James Romaine and Phoebe Wolfskill, eds. (2018)
- Schwain, Kristin, **Ch. 2**, "Henry Ossawa Tanner's Biblical Paintings and Religious Practice," in *Signs of Grace: Religion and American Art in the Gilded Age* (2008)
- Smith, Shawn Michelle, **Ch. 6**, "Photographing the 'American Negro': Nation, Race, and Photography at the Paris Exposition of 1900," in *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (1999)
- Wolfskill, Phoebe, *Archibald Motley Jr. and Racial Reinvention: The Old Negro in New Negro Art* (2017)

Studies of Film, Music and Audio

- Brooks, Maegan Parker, *A Voice That Could Stir an Army: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rhetoric of the Black Freedom Movement* (2014)
- Brooks, Maegan Parker, and Davis W. Houck, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is* (2011)
- Collier-Thomas, Bettye, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979* (1998)
- Darden, Robert, *Nothing but Love in God's Water: Black Sacred Music from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement* (2014)
- DeBose, Charles E., **Ch. 36**, "African American Church Language," in *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language*, Jennifer Bloomquist, Lisa J. Green, and Sonja L. Lanehart, eds. (2015)
- Thomas F. DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture* (2004)
- Tracy Fessenden, *Religion Around Billie Holiday* (2018)
- Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights* (2016)
- Michael W. Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (1992)
-"Part III – The Performed Word: Religious Practice"

- Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (1995)
- Reagon, Bernice Johnson, "Let the Church Sing 'Freedom'," *Black Music Research Journal* 7 (1987): 105-118.
- Teresa L. Reed, *The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music* (2003)
- Lawrence Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift and American Music, 1878-1943* (2012)
- Simmons, Martha, and Frank A. Thomas, eds., *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present* (2010)
- Taylor, Robert L., *Thomas A. Dorsey, Father of Black Gospel Music: An Interview* (2013)
- Gayle F. Wald, *Shout, Sister, Shout! The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe* (2007)
- Michael S. Weaver, "Makers and Redeemers: The Theatricality of the Black Church," *Black American Literature Forum* 25.1 (Spring 1991): 53-61.

Film

- Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, *Revelations* (1960)
- BBC, *The Godmother of Rock & Roll: Sister Rosetta Tharpe*
- *The Green Pastures* (1936)
- *Holiday Spirit Inspires Great Negro Chorus* (raw footage, Waco, TX, 1929) (**film**)
- King Vidor's *Hallelujah* (1929)
- Wallace, Mike and Louis Lomax, *The Hate that Hate Produced* (1959)
- *The March on Washington* (1963)

Audio

- Fannie Lou Hamer's 1964 Democratic National Convention Speech
- Fannie Lou Hamer, *Songs My Mother Taught Me*
- *Goodbye, Babylon*
- *Let My People Go: Negro Spirituals: Roots Collection, Vol. 9*
- *Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black American Freedom Songs 1960-1966*
- *Wade In The Water, Vol.1: African American Spirituals: The Concert Tradition*