

# AFRC 4052 / RELS 4080: Africana Sacred Communities in the U.S. [Draft Syllabus]



Course Instructor: **Prof. Vaughn A. Booker**  
Schedule: **W 3:30PM-6:29PM**  
Office Hours: **TBD**

## Course Description

This advanced seminar places contemporary Black religions at the center of the study of African-descended peoples. Through recent books in the ethnography of Africana religions, spiritual communities in Africa, the Caribbean, and North America that have established communities in the United States will constitute the focus of our course readings and anchor our weekly discussions. As an advanced seminar, our meetings will allow participants to interrogate the authors of these ethnographies. We will assess how these accounts have conceptualized the African diaspora and the vantages (“insiders” and “outsiders”) from which they describe religious beliefs, practices, and institutions. Beyond considering the commonalities and distinctions in form and practice that characterize various African diasporic religious practices, participants will also work to understand the constructions of race and belonging, ethnic identity, gender, sexuality, class, and geographic location that affect the lives of Black religious adherents.

## Required Readings

- ✚ Abdullah, Zain, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (2010) (**African Islam**) (eBook)
- ✚ Abrams, Andrea C., *God and Blackness: Race, Gender, and Identity in a Middle Class Afrocentric Church* (2014) (**First Afrikan Church**) (eBook)

- ✚ Frederick, Marla F., *Colored Television: American Religion Gone Global* (2016) (**African American, Jamaican, and Caribbean Pentecostalism/Prosperity**) (eBook)
- ✚ Haynes, Bruce D., *The Soul of Judaism: Jews of African Descent in America* (2018) (**Black Hebrews, Israelites, Jews**) (eBook)
- ✚ Hucks, Tracey E., *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (2012) (**African American Yoruba**) (eBook)
- ✚ Khabeer, Su'ad Abdul, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (2016) (**Blackness and American Islams**) (eBook)
- ✚ Lewin, Ellen, *Filled with the Spirit: Sexuality, Gender, and Radical Inclusivity in a Black Pentecostal Church* (2018) (**LGBT Black Pentecostalism**) (eBook)
- ✚ Nwokocha, Eziaku, *Vodou en Vogue: Fashioning Black Divinities in Haiti and the United States* (2023) (**Haitian Vodou**) (eBook)
- ✚ Woodbine, Onaje X. O., *Take Back What the Devil Stole: An African American Prophet's Encounters in the Spirit World* (2021) (**Prophetism, Black Religious Hybridity**) (eBook)
- All articles, books, book chapters, and audiovisual selections listed for each meeting will be available on Canvas or provided in advance of class sessions.

#### Documentaries and Videos (working list)

- ❖ "Osun-Osogbo," *Sacred Journeys with Bruce Feiler* (2014) (<https://vimeo.com/163696391>) (**Yoruba Priestess Initiation**)
- ❖ First Afrikan Church YouTube page (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIR0dCa9Zz-Kpn4jN1jgvlg/videos>) (**First Afrikan weekly worship service/sermon streams**)
- ❖ *Inside Oyotunji 23<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (2012) ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rj-4Co\\_k63k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rj-4Co_k63k)) (**Oyotunji Village**)
- ❖ *Time for Ilhan* (2018) (**Rep. Ilhan Omar, first Muslim Somali-American US Congressmember**) [Amazon Prime]
- ❖ Serrano, Angel, and Alvaro Toepke, *The Language You Cry In* (1998) (<https://www.kanopy.com/product/language-you-cry>) (**Gullah ties to Sierra Leonean ancestry**)
- ❖ Philipides, Nicholas, and Ben Schuder, *The Village of Peace* (2014) (**Hebrew Israelites**) [Amazon Prime]
- ❖ Tanya Stephan, *Life and Death the Pentecostal Way* (2016) ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED\\_Wi83mSpU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED_Wi83mSpU)) (**Black Pentecostalism in Britain**)
- ❖ Al Jazeera English, "How are black Muslims reinvigorating poetry in the US? | The Stream" (Dec 20, 2018) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ywgWQnefRc>) (**Black Islam**)
- ❖ "Black, Gay and Religious: Suppressing Sexuality for Faith?" *Peace of Mind with Taraji*, December 13, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/tarajiphenson/videos/574671947161243/> (**Religion and Sexuality**)
- ❖ "TFAM 2015 Convocation - Friday Night Worship - Bishop Yvette Flunder (Sermon Only)," *City of Refuge UCC* (2015) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Qh0KLaSMwc>) (**Bishop Yvette Flunder sermon**)

## Assessments

- ✚ **Weekly seminar attendance and reading responses (40%)**  
Each session is 2hr 59 min.

### *Reading Responses (25%)*

Each reading response is equivalent to **at least 1 double-spaced page (300 words)**. Responses are **due each Friday at 5pm Eastern time**, and students will **post them to Canvas discussions**. Graded internally as +, ✓, or -.

Your responses should address each of these areas:

1. **Description:** What is the book about? What are the argument and evidence? Chapter detailing.
2. **Assessment:** Assess the book's main claim(s) and argument, importance and distinction.
3. **Historiographical Value/Placement:** What does the book add? Where does it fit alongside the other books we have examined (or other ethnographies of Black religious communities that you have encountered)? What does it contribute?
4. **Critique:** What issues do you have with the author's approach to questioning/interacting with subjects? What did you appreciate about the author's questioning of subjects? What queries does the author's work make you want to ask now?

As you think about **the twin realities of religion and race** (religio-racial identity, religio-racial subject formation, religio-racial world-making, religio-racial oppression, etc.), consider the discourse of the following in each text:

- **Africa**
- **Authenticity**
- **Blackness**
- **Black religion**
- **Community**
- **Diaspora**
- **Home/Homeland/Homemaking**
- **Individuality**
- **Intersectionality**

For example, you may entertain these or similar questions in your responses:

- ❖ "How do the Black subjects in this study construct, narrate, and live out 'authentic' notions of religion?"
- ❖ "What is the religious and racial significance of Africa to these subjects?"
- ❖ "Does a religio-racial community's construction of Blackness cohere/clash with intersectional issues and identities?"

Overall, you must strive to convey your analysis, ideas, and questions clearly to others through the use of proper grammar, punctuation, paragraph structure, and carefully crafted sentences.

### *Seminar Attendance and Participation (15%)*

You are expected to be in attendance for every class session. Sessions will not only involve discussion of the assigned materials but may also incorporate activities based on materials introduced for discussion during class time. These class sessions are enjoyable and enlightening with each student involved. We will keep a running archive of all group work on

Canvas through the Discussions page, so that students will understand their individual and collective contributions. **If an emergency forces you to miss class, please email me as soon as reasonably possible.**

### ✚ Seminar directing (25%)

Following the first three weeks of the course, participants will work to direct the **second half of our weekly class meeting**. Seminar directors are responsible for directing, guiding, and elevating the conversation. In this case, elevating means ensuring the conversation retains a thoughtful focus on one of the guiding themes of our course. This activity encourages facilitative leadership in an academic setting for all participants involved. I encourage directors to include multimedia and/or primary sources related to the week's book in their sessions. (Prof. Booker will direct the last portion of each session.) Instead of posting reading responses for their week, **seminar directors will submit their planning notes to Prof. Booker after their session.**

### ✚ Final paper on a recent ethnographic book in the field (35%)

Due dates:

- **Prospectus – TBD BY THE END OF THE DAY**
- **Confirmed book choice + potential supplemental source bibliography – TBD BY THE END OF THE DAY**
- **Potential thesis statement/paragraph + Outline – TBD BY THE END OF THE DAY**
- **Final 12-15-page Essay – IN FINALS PERIOD (TBA)**

#### Final Paper Book Options

- Beliso-De Jesús, Aisha M., *Electric Santería: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion* (2015) (**Santería in Cuba, NYC, Miami, Los Angeles, and SF Bay Area**) ([eBook](#))
- Biney, Moses O., *From Africa to America: Religion and Adaptation among Ghanaian Immigrants in New York* (2011) (**Ghanaian Presbyterians**) ([eBook](#))
- Butler, Melvin L., *Island Gospel: Pentecostal Music and Identity in Jamaica and the United States* (2019) (**Jamaican and US Pentecostalism/Gospel**) ([eBook](#))
- Casselberry, Judith, *The Labor of Faith: Gender and Power in Black Apostolic Pentecostalism* (2017) (**NYC Apostolic Pentecostalism**) ([eBook](#))
- Clarke, Kamari Maxine, *Mapping Yorùbá Networks: Power and Agency in the Making of Transnational Communities* (2004) (**NYC, SC, and Nigerian Yorùbá**) ([eBook](#))
- Guillory, Margarita Simon, *Spiritual and Social Transformation in African American Spiritual Churches* (2018) (**African American Spiritualism**) ([eBook](#))
- Jackson, John L., *Thin Description: Ethnography and the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem* (2013) (**African-American-descended/born Hebrew Israelites**) ([eBook](#))
- Jones, Alisha Lola, *Flaming? The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance* (2020) (**African American Protestantism/Pentecostalism, Gender, and Sexuality**) ([eBook](#))
- Kane, Ousmane Oumar, *The Homeland is the Arena: Religion, Transnationalism, and the Integration of Senegalese Immigrants in America* (2011) (**Senegalese Islam**) ([eBook](#))
- Majeed, Debra, *Polygyny: What It Means When African American Muslim Women Share Their Husbands* (2015) (**African American Islam and Gender**) ([eBook](#))
- Manigault-Bryant, LeRhonda S., *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music, and Lived Memory among Gullah/Geechee Women* (2014) (**Sea Island Folk Religion/Protestantism**) ([eBook](#))

- Perez, Elizabeth, *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions* (2016) (**Lucumi in Chicago**) ([eBook](#))
  - Rey, Terry, and Alex Stepick, *Crossing the Water and Keeping the Faith: Haitian Religion in Miami* (2013) (**Haitian Catholicism, Protestantism, and Vodou**) ([eBook](#))
  - Thomas, Todne, *Kincraft: The Making of Black Evangelical Sociality* (2021) (**African American Evangelicalism**) ([eBook](#))
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## Class Policies

### *Syllabus*

I reserve the right to modify this syllabus and to add relevant brief discussion materials for class discussion.

### *Honor Principle*

[XXX]

### *Sessions*

As adults, we have the opportunity not only to develop our most articulate critical thinking in public spaces with these sessions—we also get to share a thinking space to help each other shape our critical/analytical voices and to learn how to take ownership of our ideas. I intend to facilitate discussion, but I also expect you to help your classmates learn and express themselves. This entails listening to the thoughts of others in class, responding to them, building on comments you find particularly engaging, and making sure everyone has the opportunity to voice her/his/their thoughts during class time.

### *Religious Observances*

Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

### *Electronic Device Usage*

For a class that helps you to become thoughtful listeners, watchers, and interpreters of African American religion through cultural production, the internet can certainly be your friend. Many relevant audiovisual materials will be available on Canvas, but you should also spend time looking up relevant materials as you come across them in our weekly readings. This will help you to comprehend an author's intricate analysis of historical materials, and it may reveal that you see or hear something that the author did not. Consequently, the use of laptops and/or tablets beyond taking notes is acceptable if it facilitates class discussion.

### *Email Response Policy*

The best way to reach me is via email at [yabooker@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:yabooker@sas.upenn.edu). I will likely respond to emails before 10pm. Otherwise, I will respond after 9am. It is best to send questions of high importance well in advance of an essay/assignment due date to ensure a timely response.

### *Accessibility Policy*

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are encouraged to schedule a phone/video meeting with me as early in the term as possible. This



conversation will help to establish what supports are built into this course. In order for accommodations to be authorized, students are required to consult with [XXX] If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations, they should contact [XXX]. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

### ***Classroom Recording Policy***

The use of audio or video recording materials in this course is prohibited except in circumstances of accessibility use.

By enrolling in this course, you (the student) hereby affirm that you will not under any circumstance make a recording in any medium of any class session or one-on-one meeting with the instructor without obtaining the prior written consent of all those participating, and you understand that if you violate this prohibition, you will be subject to discipline by Dartmouth up to and including expulsion, as well as any other civil or criminal penalties under applicable law.

I look forward to getting to know you and learning from you this term.

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## **Course Itinerary**

### **WEEK 1 (Aug 28) – Introduction**

#### **WEEK 2 (Sep 4)**

- Weisenfeld, Judith, "Religion in African American History," *Oxford Research Encyclopedias: American History*, March 2015, <http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-24>
- Stewart-Diakité, Dianne M., and Tracey E. Hucks, "Africana Religious Studies: Toward a Transdisciplinary Agenda in an Emerging Field," *Journal of Africana Religions*, 1.1 (2013), pp. 28-77. <https://www-jstor-org.dartmouth.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/10.5325/jafireli.1.1.0028.pdf>
- ❖ "Osun-Osogbo," *Sacred Journeys with Bruce Feiler* (2014) (<https://vimeo.com/163696391>) (Yoruba Priestess Initiation)

#### **Recommended Reading**

- Long, Charles H., "What Is Africa to Me? Reflection, Discernment, and Anticipation," *Journal of Africana Religions*, 1.1 (2013), pp. 91-108. <https://www-jstor-org.dartmouth.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/10.5325/jafireli.1.1.0091.pdf>

#### **WEEK 3 (Sep 11)**

- ✚ Abrams, Andrea C., *God and Blackness: Race, Gender, and Identity in a Middle Class Afrocentric Church* (2014) (**First Afrikan Church**)
- ❖ **Recommended viewing:** *First Afrikan Church* YouTube page (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIROdCa9Zz-Kpn4jN1jgvJg/videos>) (**First Afrikan weekly worship service/sermon streams**)

#### **WEEK 4 (Sep 18)**

- ✚ Hucks, Tracey E., *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (2012) (**African American Yoruba**)

- ❖ **Recommended viewing:** *Inside Oyotunji 23<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (2012)  
([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rj-4Co\\_k63k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rj-4Co_k63k)) (Oyotunji Village)

**WEEK 5 (Sep 25)**

- ✚ Abdullah, Zain, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (2010) (West African Islams)  
❖ **Recommended viewing:** *Time for Ilhan* (2018) (Rep. Ilhan Omar, first Muslim Somali-American US Congressman) [Amazon Prime]

**WEEK 6 (Oct 2)**

- ✚ Nwokocha, Eziaku, *Vodou en Vogue: Fashioning Black Divinities in Haiti and the United States* (2023) (Haitian Vodou)  
❖ **Recommended viewing:** TBD (XXX)

**\*\*PROSPECTUS PARAGRAPH DUE END OF DAY TBD\*\***

**WEEK 7 (Oct 9)**

- ✚ Select your final paper book and make headway reading it  
Individual meetings with Prof. Booker

**WEEK 8 (Oct 16)**

- ✚ Haynes, Bruce D., *The Soul of Judaism: Jews of African Descent in America* (2018) (Black Hebrews, Israelites, Jews)  
❖ **Recommended viewing:** Philipides, Nicholas, and Ben Schuder, *The Village of Peace* (2014) (Hebrew Israelites) [Amazon Prime]

**WEEK 9 (Oct 23)**

- ✚ Khabeer, Su'ad Abdul, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (2016) (Blackness and American Islams)  
❖ **Recommended viewing:** Al Jazeera English, "How are black Muslims reinvigorating poetry in the US? | The Stream" (Dec 20, 2018) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ywgWQnefRc>) (Black Islam)

**WEEK 10 (Oct 30)**

- ✚ Frederick, Marla F., *Colored Television: American Religion Gone Global* (2016) (African American/Jamaican/Caribbean Pentecostalism/Prosperity Gospel)  
❖ **Recommended viewing:** Tanya Stephan, *Life and Death the Pentecostal Way* (2016)  
([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED\\_Wi83mSpU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED_Wi83mSpU)) (Black Pentecostalism in Britain)

**\*\*CONFIRMED BOOK CHOICE + POTENTIAL SUPPLEMENTAL SOURCE BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE BY THE END OF THE DAY TBD\*\***

**WEEK 11 (Nov 6)**

- ✚ Discussion of confirmed book choice and supplemental source bibliography  
Individual meetings with Prof. Booker

**WEEK 12 (Nov 13)**

- ✚ Lewin, Ellen, *Filled with the Spirit: Sexuality, Gender, and Radical Inclusivity in a Black Pentecostal Church* (2018) (LGBT Black Pentecostalism)

- ❖ **Recommended viewing:** “Black, Gay and Religious: Suppressing Sexuality for Faith?” *Peace of Mind with Taraji*, December 13, 2021,  
<https://www.facebook.com/tarajiphenson/videos/574671947161243/> (Religion and Sexuality)
- ❖ **Recommended viewing:** “TFAM 2015 Convocation - Friday Night Worship - Bishop Yvette Flunder (Sermon Only),” *City of Refuge UCC* (2015)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Qh0KLaSMwc> (Bishop Yvette Flunder sermon)

#### WEEK 13 (Nov 20)

- ✚ Woodbine, Onaje X. O., *Take Back What the Devil Stole: An African American Prophet's Encounters in the Spirit World* (2021) (Prophetism, Black Religious Hybridity)
- ❖ **Recommended viewing:** *TBD* (XXX)

**\*\*POTENTIAL THESIS STATEMENT/PARAGRAPH + OUTLINE DUE BY THE END OF THE DAY TBD\*\***

#### WEEK 14 (Nov 27)

- ✚ Discussion of potential thesis statement/paragraph and outline  
Individual meetings with Prof. Booker

#### WEEK 15 (Dec 4) – Conclusion

- Khabeer, Su’ad Abdul, Yvonne Chireau, Paul Christopher Johnson, Gay Byron, Paul E. Lovejoy, Sherwin Bryant and Kathryn Lofton, “Theorizing Africana Religions: A Journal of Africana Religions Inaugural Symposium,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 2.1 (2014), pp. 125-160.  
<https://www-jstor-org.dartmouth.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/10.5325/jafireli.2.1.0125.pdf>

**\*\*FINAL 12-15-PAGE ESSAY DUE IN FINALS PERIOD (TBA) BY 5PM EASTERN\*\***