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Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois

Race, Ethnicity, and Religion (RE313): Contextualizing This Course

I. Augustana College History and Culture

Augustana College is a selective liberal arts college in Rock Island, Illinois that is related to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). It was founded in 1860 by Swedish university graduates who came to the United States, and now has an enrollment of approximately 2,300 and a faculty of more than 160. Augustana students tend to come from middle-to-upper-middle class families in the Chicago suburbs, yet there are students who come to Augustana from all over the country. The new administration has placed an important emphasis on increasing diversity on campus (racial, geographic, ethnic) and the enrollment office is under new leadership as well, so there is an optimistic and hopeful feel here on campus. In my own classes, I have seen an increase in the number of Latino, African American, and Asian students who are deciding to come to Augustana. We still have Swedish students and Swedish American students who choose to attend Augustana, but the numbers are *vastly* diminished from the 19th century. Much of the Swedish identity here is celebrated by way of annual events such as the Christmastime--Swedish meatballs, lingonberries, pickled herring and lutefisk are proudly served and consumed by alumni, faculty, and students who attend) and the Santa Lucia festivities. The college also continues to maintain a Scandinavian department and offers a major in Swedish. Balancing continuity with the college's history along with change is a theme of the college's recently published self-study, and questions that are addressed include: what does it mean to be a college affiliated with the ELCA, how important is the college's Swedish heritage today, and what should our goals be in terms of diversifying the student body as well as the faculty

Augustana Students

Augustana students are bright, privileged, and are just plain "nice." Many are legacies---they had a parent, sibling, aunt, or even grandparent who came to Augustana and who had a very good experience. Many of our students say that they have always wanted to come to Augustana because of the experiences their parents/sister/grandparent/friend had at the school. There is a good "buzz" about Augustana and students choose to come here because they want to work closely with professors, they want a good liberal arts education, they want to participate in extracurricular activities (the vast majority of our students are involved in varsity or intramurals, music, in a variety of clubs) and that Augustana "just feels right" to them.

We don't have much diversity here at Augustana---in terms of race, ethnicity, class, religion, or geography, and diversification is a big administrative priority. Most of our students hail from the Chicago suburbs, and most are upper-middle class and white, Christian and conservative. I have found that most of our students truly want to be challenged and are open to the task of critical thinking. While teaching here can be challenging given the lack of diversity, it is incredibly rewarding when students do start the journey of becoming reflective, critical thinkers---so the payoff as a professor can be and is tremendous.

The College's Religious Affiliation and Mission

Augustana College is a religiously-affiliated school, but the affiliation to the ELCA is, in practice, quite loose, unlike, for example, Luther College and Gustavus Adolphus, two comparable Lutheran liberal arts colleges where Lutheran identity and affiliation with the church is more concrete. The college has a mission statement, which is "Augustana College, rooted in the liberal arts and sciences and a Lutheran expression of the Christian faith, is committed to offering a challenging education that develops qualities of mind, spirit and body necessary for a rewarding life of leadership and service in a diverse and changing world." The college was recently awarded a Lilly vocational grant and now hosts a Center for Vocational Reflection which encourages a collaboration between faculty, students, and local communities. There is a lot of talk on campus these days about vocation---finding/discovering one's "calling" and how an education at Augustana can prepare young adults for lives of leadership. The college, through the board of trustees, has made it clear that it wishes to maintain ties to the college's Christian heritage, for example, all first-year students take part in a year-long General Education program during which they take a 100-level "Christian Traditions" course. This is a change from the former general education program in which all students were required to take a 100-level as well as a 300-level Religion course, and the courses did not have to be within "Christian Traditions." The feel of the campus is ecumenical and within the more liberal tradition of the ELCA. Campus Ministries reflects the ELCA's desire to engage in dialogue with other faiths. Currently, Campus Ministries consists of Pastor Richard Priggie, an ELCA-ordained Lutheran pastor; and Sister Marilyn Ring, a member of the Benedictine Order. We are also currently in the process of hiring a Latino associate chaplain.

The Department of Religion

The Department of Religion at Augustana College is a service-oriented department, even more so than most departments here, in that that most of the students taking our course are doing so because they have to (the 100-level Christian Traditions course) or that our classes fulfill distribution requirements. Because Augustana students, after next year's graduating class of 2007 will no longer be required to take a 300-level religion, we have recently reconfigured our course offerings in order to remain competitive in the larger "marketplace" of the college. We currently have five tenured members of the department and their areas of specialization are in Hebrew Bible, New Testament, philosophy of religion, ethics, and World Religions. Not only is our department very "Lutheran," it is very "Christian": three of the five tenure-track professors are ordained Lutheran ministers, and a fourth is an active member of the ELCA.

I have the sixth tenure-track line and I am the department's Americanist. In addition to the six tenure-track lines, we also have two faculty members on three-year appointments because of the heavy demand placed on the department to offer the 100-level Christian Traditions courses. We tend to have, on average, about thirty to forty majors, most of whom are double majors. Our majors go on to a variety of careers, including: medicine, nonprofit work, pastors, and business. A good number of our majors go on to seminary and become pastors. A small number of our majors go on to graduate-level programs in Religious Studies, though that number is slowly starting to rise. Religion "matters" in my department on multiple levels---as an academic discipline, but also for deeply personal reasons for faculty members as well as for majors and minors, most of whom decide to initially major in Religion because religion is an important component in their daily lives.

The Rationale Behind This Course: A Flexible Title Is Necessary

The course that I have worked on for the Young Scholars program is part of the department's new reconfiguration; it was formerly entitled "African American Religions" but as I thought about the course, I wanted to broaden it a bit and make it potentially more comparative. The course counts towards the college's African American Studies minor, so I feel an obligation to focus on African American religions and history, though I want to keep my options open, too. I will probably offer this course every year, and will probably have two syllabi for the course: one that focuses on African Americans and another that is more comparative. Whatever focus I decide on will be advertised in the College's student course catalogue so that students have the information prior to registration. I feel an obligation to the African American Studies minor, especially since there are so few of us teaching courses that count towards the minor. Because institutional policy dictates that a course must be dropped in order for a new course to be added, I have had to work within the limitations and needed to offer a course with a broad enough title under which I could potentially teach a variety of courses. The RE313 course I have written for the Young Scholars program focuses on African American religious experiences and I will offer it every other year at Augustana.

In addition, the new general education program encourages professors to be more interdisciplinary in their course offerings and in this new program at Augustana, students have to take 2 courses from each of the following "perspectives": 1.) perspectives on the arts; perspectives on human existence and values; 2.) perspectives on literature and texts; 3.) perspectives on the natural world; 4.) perspectives on the past; 5.) perspectives on individuals and society. In addition, students have to fulfill diversity and global perspectives requirements. RE313 Race, Ethnicity and Religion counts towards two of these requirements: Perspectives on Individuals and Society and Diversity---so students can "double dip" with this course. One of the things that I struggle with is breadth versus depth in my courses---the challenge is that we have a quarter system here; 3 terms (Fall, Winter, Spring) of ten weeks apiece. Since I am trained as an interdisciplinary scholar of American religions, I am comfortable focusing on themes, and issues of continuity and change within those themes. I have found that rather than using a textbook, most of which are designed for semester-long courses (and which students have found boring when I have assigned them!), assigning a combination of books and articles works best, both for my 100-level and 300-level courses.

The Ethnographic Project With A Service-Learning Component

I have decided to assign an ethnographic research project with a service-learning component as the main assignment for the course. Although we have short terms here at Augustana, which can be problematic as I am always wanting a few more weeks to go more deeply into the issues, I have found that students are able to conduct fieldwork and to write reflexive, critical accounts of their experiences and of the groups that they have studied. I have assigned ethnographic research projects with success in my RE140, "American Religions" and in my LS110 "American Christianities" courses. For those courses, students visited local churches, temples, and religious sites, conducted interviews, and wrote ethnographic papers that were informed by secondary sources. I have been wanting for some time now to incorporate an ethnographic project into one of my 300-level courses and this course seems to be a good fit for what I'd like the students to do. Yet even though students' ethnographic research papers have been quite good from the 100-level classes, I---and the students---have found that while they

benefited intellectually, personally, even spiritually from the assignment, many of them were left wanting to “do something” for the communities which hosted them for the ten weeks. So, after four years of students’ feedback and my own ruminations about the responsibilities of the scholar to her/his host community and interlocutors, I decided to add a service learning component to the ethnographic project. I still want the project to have academic research goals, but I also want the students to engage in some kind of service to the individuals and communities with whom they will be working--to give back to the communities in some way.

Project Details:

Students will work in groups of 4 and they will conduct ethnographic research together as a team. They will attend religious services, interview members of the community, and will participate in the religious life of the community as best as they can in the ten-week term. Their final research papers will be their own, but the research that they have gathered will have been a group effort. I realize how daunting ethnographic research is, and have found through experience that students work best within a supportive team---this kind of project is very new for them and is challenging on multiple levels. As their professor/class facilitator, I will work with the students throughout the 10-week term, assisting them in their projects continually. And, as I have done in previous classes, I will attend one religious service with each group and will meet with them afterward to discuss our impressions and observations. I will also share my own fieldnotes with them and will spend time in and outside of class discussing how to take good fieldnotes. Students will also read selections from Robert Emerson’s, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw’s *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago, 1995), and we will discuss the art of taking and interpreting notes during class. I want the students to see this project as an organic project---one that is integrated, not separate, from what we are doing in the classroom.

Kristy Nabhan-Warren
RE 313 Race, Ethnicity, and Religion (fulfills PS, D requirements)
***Class Focus: African American Religions and the Meanings of Race and Ethnicity**
Class meets: MWF B period (10-11:15 Old Main 335)
Fall 2007
Dr. Kristy's Office Hours: Mondays 12-2 and by appointment, Old Main 222B
Office: 222 Old Main; ext. 7718

I. Introduction:

Welcome to RE313, where we will spend the next ten weeks together examining some of the ways in which race, ethnicity, and religion overlap and inform one another within African American communities. But before we begin our journey of exploration, we need to ask ourselves, what do these term and concepts *mean* (both to African Americans as well as others) and how have they been used in the United States/ context? According to social theorists Michael Omi and Howard Winant, “Racial categories and the meanings of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded” (1986, 60). In this course, we will explore how “racial categories” and the “meanings of race” have been used to define African Americans and also how African Americans determine racial categories for themselves and others. In this course we will be looking at the multiple ways in which race, ethnicity, and religious identities overlap for African Americans, and how African American men, women, and children negotiate their way through the complex meanings that are inscribed on them and to those that they ascribe to themselves.

In addition to the readings and films that are assigned for class, you will embark upon an ethnographic research project with a small group of your classmates. You will form a team of anthropologists and you will work together for the ten weeks, conducting ethnographic research in a local African American religious community which will culminate in a 10-15 page paper at the end of the term. My hope is that you will see this assignment as a critical extension of our in-class discussions and readings, and that what we do in the classroom will provide you with historical and theoretical tools that will help you as you conduct your ethnographic research.

Course Objectives:

*To study how African Americans have negotiated issues of race, ethnicity, and religion and to see where there are points of tension, contestation, and harmony.

*To understand how people form identities and how these identities (racial, ethnic, religious) overlap

*To engage with contemporary religious communities in the Quad Cities to understand how our neighbors negotiate their racial, ethnic, and religious identities

*To understand ourselves (and even our families) and where/how we “fit” into this larger schema of issues better.

II. Books to Purchase For The Class: (Books are all for sale in the College Runestone Bookstore)

- 1.) James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*
- 2.) Sonnyreya Tate, *Little X*
- 3.) *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, as told to Alex Haley; 1999 version with a foreword by Attallah Shabazz
- 4.) Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*
- 5.) Cain Hope Felder, *Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives*
- 6.) Peter T. Nash, *Reading Race, Reading the Bible*

**In addition to the required books, all other readings and articles for the class are on Library Electronic Reserve under Nabhan-Warren RE313

III. Writing Assignments:

1.) Four 4-page critical response essays to the assigned readings. 25 points each (100 points total)

*Due as indicated in the syllabus with an asterick.

For these papers, I want you to choose a reading or readings from class to critically analyze. Choose readings that particularly intrigued you and respond to them. For example---if you were moved by Malcolm X's conversion to the nation of Islam, you may want to write a paper that critically analyzes the attraction of the NOI for African Americans and what it offers for young urban Black men, in particular. The topic is up to you---I want you to write about something that interests you and that you can *say something* about. We will talk more about this assignment in class during the first week.

2.) Ethnographic/Service-Learning Paper: 10-15 pages. (100 points)

For this project, you will work with a local African American place of worship in small groups and will conduct research for your final paper. In addition to your role as an ethnographer, you will also be of service to the community and will do service work, at the community's discretion, for them (This could range from working in the church's nursery school to painting the church's kitchen) You will be wearing several "hats" for this project: on the one hand, you will be, first and foremost, **anthropologists** who will attend services at the church, conduct interviews with members of the community, and engage in conversations. You will also be **historians**; you will conduct some background research into the history of the denomination that you will be studying in order to gain a deeper understanding of the contemporary religious culture. You will also be **of service** to the men, women, and children with who you will be working---you will be doing work for them and with them. And finally, you will be **reflexive**---you will be writing about what you have learned, on a personal level, from your ethnographic research. What did you learn from doing service for the community? Are you a different person now, somehow changed?

I'd like to see the following components in your papers:

- 1.) **A thick description of the community and place of worship.** Provide your reader with a rich understanding of the religious life of the place of worship. Provide details: what does the place look like? Who attends services there? What are members of the congregation like? What

kinds of religious art is on the walls? Other visuals? Provide details---bring your reader into the lived religious world.

2.) **Historical contextualization of the community.** For example, if you are researching a Pentecostal Church of God in Christ in the Quad Cities, find books and articles that help you make sense of what is going on in the church where you are working. I'd like to see you incorporate at least 5 academic sources, using a combination of books and articles, into your paper to give context to your ethnographic work. You can use and incorporate the sources we read for class as well---these "count" towards the five sources.

3.) **An analysis of how the issues of race, ethnicity, and religion come into play at this particular place of worship.** This is the more theoretical part of your paper and where you can draw on our class conversations and readings from the ten weeks.

4.) **Authorial Reflexivity:** I want to know how you felt while conducting research for your paper. What did you learn from your role as an ethnographer? What did it mean to be an ethnographer in this community?

5.) **Service-learning component/reflexivity:** What did you learn as a result of doing service for the community? Was this different from what you learned as an ethnographer? In what ways did your roles as ethnographer and server overlap? In what ways did they not? Did they come into conflict?

Human Subject Committee Approval

The Augustana College Human Subjects Committee requires that we submit our proposals when we are working in communities as researchers. We will be submitting our class proposals the first week of class.

Fieldwork and Religious Sites From Which You Can Choose For Your Ethnographic/Service-Learning Project (and I am open to your suggestions as well)

- 1.) Derrick's Temple Church of God in Christ (715 6th Avenue, Rock Island, IL. #309-786-0026)
- 2.) Victory Temple Church of God in Christ (1001 18th Avenue, Rock Island, IL. #309-788-2059)
- 3.) Progressive Baptist Church (1302 E. 12th St., Davenport. #563-322-0151)
- 4.) Wayman A.M.E. Church (1328 3rd Ave., Rock Island, IL. #309-786-0813)
- 5.) Bethel A.M.E. Church (323 W. 11th St., Davenport. #563-322-6622)
- 6.) St. Paul A.M.E. Church (1222 7th Ave., Moline. #309-764-5804)
- 7.) Islamic Center of the Quad Cities (6005 34th Ave., Moline. #309-792-1690)

IV. Oral Presentations:

Final group presentation of your ethnographic/service-learning project (50 points)

You and members of your ethnographic group will present your findings to the class during our Saturday afternoon session during week ten. You will have the opportunity to share your insights with your classmates over pizza and sodas. I will provide you with a handout detailing what I expect to see in these presentations. During your allotted time, you will need to address the five main areas of the project: 1.) The ethnographic, 2.) The historical, 3.) The reflexive, 4.) The theoretical, and 5.) The service-learning component.

V. Class Participation (50 points)

This is a learning community and I expect each of us to *regularly contribute* to class discussions. Please come to class with the assigned readings for the day and be prepared to discuss and analyze them. I will be the class facilitator---that is, I will help contextualize the readings and will serve as a moderator for our class discussions. The success of the course depends on all of our active participation and engagement and I promise to do my very best to make this an intellectually engaging, exciting course.

VI. Grading Scale: 300 points total for the course

On this scale, a 300 constitutes an A+, the highest grade possible.

90%-93% constitutes an A-; 94%-99% constitutes an A.

The formula that applies to Bs, Cs, and Ds: 80%-83% constitutes a B-; 84%-87% constitutes a B; 88%-89% constitutes a B+. 70%-73% constitutes a C-; 74%-77% constitutes a C; 78%-79% constitutes a C+. 60%-63% constitutes a D-; 64%-67% constitutes a D; 68%-69% constitutes a D+.

VII. Course Schedule and Readings:

Week One: Exploring the Concepts of Race & Ethnicity: Theoretical Considerations

Monday: Introduction to the class, discussion of assignments, and handouts detailing the assignments.

Wednesday: Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Introduction: Paradigms of Race: Ethnicity, Class and Nation" (Library Electronic Course Reserve) and K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, selections from *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Library Electronic Course Reserve)

Friday: Naomi Zack, "Toward a Critical Theory of 'Race'" (Library Electronic Course Reserve)

Week Two: Signifying/Significations and the Genealogy of Racism

Monday: Discuss Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "The Signifying Monkey and the Language of Signifyin(g): Rhetorical Difference and Orders of Meaning and "The Signifying Monkey" ballad/toast. * We will also listen to the ballad in class. (Library Electronic Course Reserve)

Wednesday: Cornel West, "American Africans in Conflict: Alienation in an Insecure Culture" and "A Genealogy of Modern Racism" (Library Electronic Course Reserve)

Friday: Patricia A. Turner, "Contemptible Collectibles" and "Back to the Kitchen" (Library Electronic Course Reserve)***Critical response #1 due**

Week Three: Race, Racism, and Biblical Narratives

Monday: Peter T. Nash, *Reading Race, Reading the Bible*

Wednesday: Cain Hope Felder, *Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives*. *Reading Handout for Friday

Friday: Fieldnotes Discussion Day. Bring the notes you have taken so far to class. We will discuss them as well as selections from *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Week Four: Slavery and the Creation of a Distinctive African American Religiosity

Monday: Harriett Jacobs, “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,” selections from *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Frederick Douglass, selections from *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (Library Electronic Course Reserve)

Wednesday: Albert Raboteau, “‘The Invisible Institution’: Religion Among the Slaves” (Library Electronic Course Reserve)

Friday: Spirituals: “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?,” “City Called Heaven,” *”Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel,” *”Soon I will Be Done,” “No More Auction Block,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” *Steal Away To Jesus,” *”Go Down, Moses” and *”Been in the Storm So Long” from *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. We will listen to the * spirituals in class. (Library Electronic Course Reserve) ***Critical response #2 due**

Week Five: The Civil Rights Movement And Religious Activism

Monday: Albert J. Raboteau, “How Far the Promised Land?: Black Religion and Black Protest” (Library Electronic Course Reserve); Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter From a Birmingham Jail,” (Library Electronic Course Reserve)

Wednesday: Clips from “This Far By Faith: African-American Spiritual Journeys” and discussion.

Friday: Ethnographic project day: discussion of the ethnographic work and service-learning you have done so far.

***Friday night movie: Spike Lee, “4 Little Girls”**

Week Six: The Black Power Movement: An Inside Look

Monday: Michael Omi and Howard Winant, “The Great Transformation.” Also: “Black Power: Statement by the National Committee of Negro Churchmen, July 31, 1966” and “The Black Manifesto: Introduction: Total Control as the Only Solution to the Economic Problems of Black People.”

Wednesday: Sonyrea Tate, *Little X*

Friday: Sonyrea Tate, *Little X* ***Critical response #3 due**

Week Seven: The Nation of Islam as a Case Study of Black Power Meets Religious Ingenuity

Monday: Finish *Little X*. Start discussion of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Wednesday: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Friday: Finish *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

* **Friday night movie: Spike Lee’s “X”. 7 p.m. Olin Auditorium**

Week Eight: Womanism and Black Women’s Experiences

Monday: Emilie M. Townes, “Black Women: From Slavery To Womanist Liberation” (Library Electronic Course Reserve)

Wednesday: Patricia Morton, “The Myths of Black Womanhood”, “Prefabricated Women of the Mid-Twentieth-Century” and W.E.B. DuBois, “The Damnation of Women” (Library Electronic Course Reserve)

Friday: Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “The Roles of Church and Community Mothers” and “The Role of Women in the Sanctified Church. (Library Electronic Course Reserve)

Week Nine: Particularities of Black Religion and Praxis: A Case Study

Monday: Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*

Wednesday: Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*

Friday: Finish *The Sanctified Church*. Supplementary reading: Albert Raboteau, "From Plantation to Ghetto: Religion in the City" (Library Electronic Course Reserve) ***Critical response #4 due**

Week Ten: Black Religion and Praxis, Case Study, Cont.

Monday: James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*,

Wednesday: James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*

Friday: Howard Winant, "Race, Class and Political Economy: Reflection on an Unfinished Agenda" ***Final ethnographic/service-learning paper due**

Final Presentations: Saturday afternoon of finals week, 4 hours, approx. meeting time. I will provide pizza and sodas.