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Mississippi State University
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Institutional Context and Teaching Approach

Mississippi State University is a land-grant university with just over 20,000 students. Those of us in the humanities and social sciences work to broaden and build on the university's science-oriented focus and strengths.

Mississippi State's undergraduates arrive with widely varied levels of preparation. Our students come primarily from Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Louisiana. Overall, the student population is about 70% white, over 20% African American, and nearly 10% international. Forty percent of our students arrive as transfers from the state's community colleges. We also have a large proportion of ROTC students and veterans. The diversity of age, experience, and ethnicity makes for lively conversation and surprisingly varied perspectives, once students feel encouraged to speak up in class.

African American Religious History is a new upper-level course in the History Department, where I also teach American religious history, twentieth century United States history, and historical methods. The course is cross-listed with African American Studies. Upper-level courses have a maximum enrollment of thirty students and meet twice weekly in blocks of one hour and fifteen minutes. There are no prerequisites.

This course follows the same format as my existing American Religious History course. I lecture briefly as necessary to clarify themes and historical moments, but I stress conversation more than coverage. Students work frequently in groups or pairs to think through material they have read or to work their way through primary source readings in class. Most weeks, class includes an audio or video component, brief enough to view or hear and then discuss together alongside assigned readings.

The course revolves around the assigned readings: scholarly books and articles, primary documents, a memoir, some fiction, and short online essays that provide historical perspective on contemporary issues. I have found memoir and fiction to be particularly effective at grabbing students' attention and exercising their empathetic abilities. We talk at some length about different types of texts and media—how historians build on primary sources, and how they follow different rules from writers of memoir and fiction as they craft narratives about the same events. On occasion, we read or examine several textual or material primary sources, a secondary source, a work of fiction, and then view a documentary or hear a song, all based on the same moment or event. We then talk about the points of contact and divergence among those sources. I find this intense engagement with widely varied materials to be an effective way to teach both the distinctions among types of sources and the methods of historical interpretation.

The course assignments build on the skills students develop in weekly conversations. Rather than exams, I assign weekly in-class reading responses, which also serve as

conversation openers. Students complete three short papers, which I scaffold to prepare students for the final research paper assignment, on a topic of their choice.

HISTORY 4990
African American Religious History
Dr. Alison Collis Greene

Required Books

Edward E. Curtis IV, *Muslims in America: A Short History*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
Paul Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through the Night: A History of African American Christianity*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.
Milton Sernett, ed. *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*. Duke, 2000.
Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Health, Healing, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*. UNC, 2002.
James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Vintage, 2013 [1953].

Articles, Essays, and Short Stories

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Power in the Story," from *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon, 1997.
Laurie Maffly-Kipp, "The Hope of Ferguson," *Religion and Politics* (online), August 25, 2014
Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, "From Light to White: The Place and Race of Jesus in Antebellum America," *Historically Speaking* 13, no. 4 (September 2012).
Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "The Feminist Theology of the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1900," in David G. Hackett, ed., *Religion and American Culture: A Reader* (Routledge, 2003).
Judith Weisenfeld, "'My Story Begins Before I Was Born': Myth, History, and Power in Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*," in S. Brent Plate, ed., *Representing Religion in World Cinema: Filmmaking, Mythmaking, Culture Making* (Palgrave, 2003), 43-66.
Matthew J. Cressler, "Black Catholic Conversion and the Burden of Black Religion," *Journal of Africana Religions* 2, no. 2 (2014): 280-287.
Richard Wright, "Fire and Cloud," from *Uncle Tom's Children*. Harper Perennial, 2004 [1936].
Gayle Wald, "From Spiritual to Swing: Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Gospel Crossover," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (September 2003): 387-416.
Tim Retzlaff, "Seer or Queer: Postwar Fascination with Detroit's Prophet Jones," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8.3 (2002): 271-296.
Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (June 2004).
Timothy B. Tyson, "Robert F. Williams, 'Black Power', and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle," *Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (September 1998): 540-570.
James H. Cone, "Martin and Malcolm," in David G. Hackett, ed., *Religion and American Culture: A Reader* (Routledge, 2003)
Jonathan Walton, "The Greening of the Gospel (and Black Body): Rev Ike's Gospel of Wealth and Post-Blackness Theology," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 33, no. 2 (July 2011): 181-199.
Heather Ann Thompson, "How Prisons Change the Balance of Power in America," *The Atlantic* (online), October 7, 2013.
Heather Ann Thompson, "Shame of the Nation: The Fight to Keep Children Locked Up for Life," *Huffington Post* (online), October 6, 2014
Lerone A. Martin, "For Michael Brown, Justice is Not a Gift. It's a Right." *Religion and Politics* (online), September 9, 2014.

Course Goals

This course provides an introduction to African American religious history from the colonial period to the present. The course textbook provides a broad overview of African American religious history, which provides a common base of knowledge for our discussions. The additional course readings, lectures, documentary viewings, and class discussion provide an opportunity to examine particular moments or movements in more depth. By the end of the course, students should have both a general knowledge of African American religious history and a more comprehensive knowledge of a few particularly rich moments and themes in that history.

Good historians are good analytical thinkers and good writers. This course emphasizes these two interrelated skills, which are essential not only for historians but also for college graduates and professionals in any field. Writing is the best way to develop and demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of a particular topic and to hone analytical skills. Thus, this course will focus on building those skills through brief in-class writing activities, three short analytical essays, and a longer research essay.

Course Expectations

Success in this course requires regular attendance, active participation, and timely completion of readings and written assignments.

Attendance and participation: This course meets twice weekly, with meetings devoted to a combination of interactive discussion, group work with texts, mini-lectures, and analysis of film and audio clips. Students who complete the weekly course readings will be prepared to engage in class activities and earn high marks in participation. Because students' regular attendance and active participation is essential to the success of the course, participation and in-class reading responses together comprise 30% of the course grade. Periodically, class discussions will draw from or conclude with brief in-class written assignments, which are included in the course participation grade. Students who miss more than two class meetings or who come to class unprepared to discuss the week's readings do so at the expense of the final grade.

In-class reading responses: To encourage full participation, completion of course readings, and punctual arrival, Monday meetings begin with a short, open-ended question drawn from the assigned readings. Tardy or absent students forfeit the opportunity to complete the day's reading response. Students will complete all reading responses in a blue book.

A note on laptops and other devices: This class requires minimal note-taking, and laptops are unnecessary. Please respect our brief time together each week and keep your phones and other electronic devices on vibrate and out of reach.

Graded Assignments

In addition to regular participation and reading responses, students will complete three 500-750-word papers (2-3 pages) and one 2000-2500 word research paper (8-10 pages). The first paper invites students to recount their own intellectual history, with an emphasis on influential mentors and books. The next two papers engage questions drawn from assigned course readings and primary sources. Essay 2, a primary source essay, asks students to use the Fett monograph to analyze one of three primary sources on the history of slave religion and traditions. Essay 3, a cultural analysis, requires that students draw on a relevant course reading of their choice to analyze a film, work of fiction, or work of art from the period between the Civil War and World War II.

I will post more detailed instructions and guidelines on Blackboard two weeks before each paper's due date, and we will also discuss each assignment in class. The final paper is a longer research paper that requires students to integrate primary and secondary materials into a study of a particular event, moment, or movement in African American religious history. Students will submit all papers online through turnitin.com and in hard copy *at the start of class on the due date*. Timely completion of assignments is mandatory. Each day an assignment is late results in an automatic deduction of half a letter grade.

Grading Scale

Participation and in-class assignments	twice weekly	15%
Weekly reading responses	weekly	15%
Intellectual autobiography	Week 2	10%
Primary source essay	Week 6	15%
Cultural analysis essay	Week 10	15%
Research essay proposal & bibliography	Week 13	10%
Research essay	Week 15	20%

A: 90-100 B: 80-89.9 C: 70-79.9 D: 60-69.9 F: 59.9 & below

Honor Code

Mississippi State University has an approved Honor Code that applies to all students. It reads: "As a Mississippi State University student I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do."

Upon accepting admission to Mississippi State University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning, and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor Code. Students will be required to state their commitment on examinations, research papers, and other academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the MSU community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor Code. For additional information please visit:

www.honorcode.msstate.edu

Special Needs and Accommodations

Any student with a learning challenge or other special needs should provide appropriate verification from Student Support Services detailing any special accommodations required.

Course Schedule

Complete each week's required reading in time for that Monday's class meeting.

WEEK 1: Why Talk about the Past (and Who Gets to Tell the Stories)?: African American Religious History from Jamestown to Ferguson

Readings: Trouillot, "The Power in the Story"
Laurie Maffly-Kipp, "The Hope of Ferguson"

WEEK 2: Africans Arrive in the Americas

Readings: Curtis, *Muslims in America*, Preface and Chapter 1
Harvey, *Through the Storm*, Introduction and Chapters 1-2
AARH I.1. Olaudah Equiano, Traditional Ibo Religion and Culture
AARH I.2. Bryan Edwards, African Religions in Colonial Jamaica

Due: *Essay 1: Intellectual Autobiography*

WEEK 3: Religious Adaptation in the Early Republic and Antebellum America

Readings: Fett, *Working Cures*, Preface, Introduction, and Part I (Chapters 1-4)
AARH II.7 Peter Randolph, Plantation Churches: Visible and Invisible
AARH II.9. Henry Bibb, Conjuraton and Witchcraft

WEEK 4: The Varieties of African Religions in Antebellum America

Readings: Fett, *Working Cures*, Part II (Chapters 5-7) and Conclusion
AARH II.8 Sister Kelly, "Proud of that 'Ole Time' Religion"
AARH III.16 Jarena Lee, "A Female Preacher among the African Methodists"

WEEK 5: Protestant Images of Jesus from Slavery to Emancipation

Readings: Blum and Harvey, "From Light to White"
Harvey, *Through the Storm*, Chapter 3
AARH II.12. Frederick Douglass, "Slaveholding Religion and the Christianity of Christ"
AARH II.18, David Walker, "Our Wretchedness in Consequence of the Preachers of Religion"

WEEK 6: Gender and Christianity in the Nadir and Beyond

FILM SCREENING: *Daughters of the Dust*
Readings: Weisenfeld, "My Story Begins Before I Was Born"
Higginbotham, "The Feminist Theology of the Black Baptist Church"
AARH IV.29, Amanda Smith, "The Travail of a Female Colored Evangelist"
Due: *Essay 2: Primary Source Analysis [Fett and your selected source]*

WEEK 7: "The Black Church" and Black Churches from WWI to WWII

Readings: Wright, "Fire and Cloud"
Harvey, *Through the Storm*, Chapter 5
Curtis, *Muslims in America*, Chapter 2
AAEH IV.35, W.E.B. DuBois, "Of the Faith of Our Fathers"
AARH VI.47 Marcus Garvey, Garvey Tells His Own Story

- WEEK 8: Memoir and Childhood in the Great Depression**
 Readings: James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*
- WEEK 9: Midcentury Transformations in Black Religion and Culture**
 Readings: Cressler, "Black Catholic Conversion and the Burden of Black Religion"
 Wald, "From Spiritual to Swing"
 Curtis, *Muslims in America*, Chapter 3
 AARH VI.50 Father Divine, "The Realness of God to you-wards"
- WEEK 10: Christianity, Sex, and the Early Civil Rights Movement**
 Readings: Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown"
 Retzliff, "Seer or Queer"
Due: *Essay 3: Cultural Analysis Essay*
- WEEK 11: Religion, Irreligion, and Civil Rights**
 DOCUMENTARY SCREENING: Excerpts from *Eyes on the Prize*
 Readings: Tyson, "Robert F. Williams, 'Black Power', and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle"
 Harvey, *Through the Storm*, Chapter 6
 AARH VII.54, Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From a Birmingham Jail"
- WEEK 12: From Black Liberals to Black Power**
 Readings: Cone, "Martin and Malcolm"
 Curtis, *Muslims in America*, Chapter 4
 AARH VI.52, Wallace D. Muhammad, "Self-Government in the New World"
 AARH VII.57, National Conference of Black Churchmen: Black Power and Black Theology
- WEEK 13: Christianity, Capitalism, and Post-Blackness**
 Readings: Walton, "The Greening of the Gospel (and the Black Body)"
 Harvey, *Through the Storm*, Epilogue
Due: *Final Essay Proposal and Bibliography*
- WEEK 14: Old Fears, the New Jim Crow, and Black Freedom in the 21st Century**
 Readings: Curtis, *Muslims in America*, Chapter 5
 Thompson, "How Prisons Change the Balance of Power in America"
 Thompson, "Shame of the Nation"
 Martin, "For Michael Brown, Justice is Not a Gift. It's a Right"
- WEEK 15: Course Conclusion: Why Talk about the Past—and How Will You Tell the Stories?**
Due: *Final essay*