

AAAS 27

## Transformative Spiritual Journeys

### Contemporary Memoirs of African American Religion

Course Instructor: Prof. Vaughn Booker ([Vaughn.A.Booker@dartmouth.edu](mailto:Vaughn.A.Booker@dartmouth.edu))

Schedule: **Summer 2019, MW (6A: 6:30pm-8:20pm), No X-hour, Berry Library 371**

Office Hours: **Th 1:30pm-3:30pm, and by appointment, 201 Choate House (AAAS)**

**Welcome! Make sure to complete this [pre-course questionnaire](#).**

#### Course Overview

This course presents African Americans who have created religious and spiritual lives amid the variety of possibilities for religious belonging in the second half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. By engaging an emerging canon of autobiographies, we will take seriously the writings of theologians, religious laity, spiritual gurus, hip hop philosophers, LGBT clergy, religious minorities, and scholars of religion as foundational for considering contemporary religious authority through popular and/or institutional forms of African American religious leadership. Themes of spiritual formation and religious belonging as a process— healing, self-making, writing, growing up, renouncing, dreaming, and liberating—characterize the religious journeys of the African American writers, thinkers, and leaders whose works we will examine. Each weekly session will also incorporate relevant audiovisual religious media, including online exhibits, documentary films, recorded sermons, tv series, performance art, and music. Open to all.

**Dist: TMV; WCult: CI.**

#### Learning Objectives

This course will provide students with a scope of the religious diversity in contemporary black America. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Know the contemporary debates over belief and competition for belonging in African American religious life
- Grasp the nature of black religious authority that includes, but extends beyond, church pulpits
- Articulate black religious identities as intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and profession
- Understand African American memoirs and autobiographies as theological literature

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## Required Readings

- All article, book chapter, and audiovisual selections listed for each meeting will be available on Canvas, through Dartmouth Library, or provided in advance of class sessions. **You are to complete all readings before each class session, unless otherwise indicated. I will inform students beforehand of which multimedia to view before class sessions.**

### **From the Baker-Berry Library Reserve Desk: Abuse of Library Privileges**

Abuse of Library privileges is a breach of the College code of conduct (Standard VIII) and may result in disciplinary action as determined by the Deans.

It is expected that all people, following the College code of conduct, will treat with respect the recorded and published materials on course reserve in the library. All people will respect the rights of all to ready and continuing access to these course reserve materials.

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## Assessments

### **Weekly seminar meetings, reading responses, and a final research paper**

**30%** for attendance and participation

**30%** for reading responses (1 per week)

**40%** for the research paper, **DUE 08/27 AT 5PM EST**

Mon. and Wed., each session is 1hr. 50 min. **There is no X-hour.**

### *Seminar Attendance and Participation*

You are expected to be in attendance for every class session. Sessions will not only involve discussion of the assigned materials but also activities based on materials introduced for discussion during class time. These class sessions are enjoyable and enlightening with each student involved. **If an emergency forces you to miss class, please email me as soon as reasonably possible.**

### *Reading Responses*

Each weekly reading response is equivalent to **at least 1 double-spaced page (300 words)** with **1-2 discussion questions**. Responses are due **each Fri. by 5pm (post to Canvas discussions)**. While responses can incorporate your experiences with each week's audiovisual and in-class materials, **they must demonstrate your thorough engagement with the assigned readings**.

The most helpful written responses accomplish some of the following things:

- Identify the main idea(s) of an author's article or chapter(s), and engage these through questions, criticisms, and/or affirmations
- Place readings/authors in critical conversation with each other (within the same week of readings or from previous weeks)
- Place the readings in conversation with the major concepts and arguments raised in lectures
- Relate your acquired knowledge (from these readings) with familiar knowledge (past coursework or relevant life experiences)

Each of your reading responses can focus on one of these tasks or even combine some of them. Overall, however, you must strive to convey your ideas and questions clearly to others through the use of proper grammar, punctuation, paragraph structure, and carefully crafted sentences. Additionally, please feel welcome to elaborate on your responses in our class sessions.

### *Research Paper*

This is your opportunity to think through our seminar discussions, as well as your reading responses and discussion questions, with a culminating **research paper on an African American religious figure and their autobiographical writing**. This paper should include engagement with our required course materials, but it is also your opportunity to incorporate your own research into African American religious history and contemporary religious life. Each weekly unit header (see the Course Schedule below) provides ideas for potential areas to consider for your research, but you can be creative in this regard. To prepare your paper, you have **the following benchmark deadlines**:

- Prospectus due **07/19**
- Working bibliography due **08/02**
- Potential thesis statement + Outline due **08/16**
- Final 10-page essay due **08/27 AT 5PM EST**

Please visit my office hours or schedule a meeting to discuss your approaches to this assignment.

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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*

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/judicialaffairs/honor/students.html>

## *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.

## *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 [vaughn.a.booker@dartmouth.edu](mailto:vaughn.a.booker@dartmouth.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*

Please contact me as soon as possible if you require the use of accessible resources for participation in this course.

## *Classroom Recording Policy*

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

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

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## Course Itinerary

### WEEK 1

**(06/17 and 06/19) – No class meetings**

### WEEK 2

#### Overview

#### **(06/24) - African American Religion in History and in the Present**

- 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>
- Bailey, Julius H., **Ch. 6**, “[The Contemporary Scene](#),” in *Down in the Valley: An Introduction to African American Religious History* (2016), **175-224**
- **IN CLASS [V]** Ben Schuder, and Niko Philipides, *The Village of Peace* (2015) [available via [Amazon Prime](#)]

**RECOMMENDED - [V]** Main, Ronald G., *The Leah Daughtry Story: A Woman of Faith and Politics* (2008) (**Pentecostalism and Politics, Dartmouth alumna**) [**Course Media Gallery**]

#### **(06/26) - Conversion and Complex Religious Belonging**

- Raboteau, Albert J., **Ch. 8**, “[The Conversion Experience](#),” in *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (1995), **152-165**
- Hucks, Tracey E., **Ch. 7**, “[‘That’s Alright...I’m a Yoruba Baptist’: Negotiating Religious Plurality and ‘Theological Openness’ in African American Yoruba Practice](#),” in *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (2012), **226-270**
- **IN CLASS [V]** Visual adaptation of Langston Hughes’s “Salvation” essay, in *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (1940): [Salvation - Langston Hughes](#) (**30 MIN**)

### WEEK 3

#### **New Thought Spirituality and Yoruba Religion**

**(07/01)**

- Vanzant, Iyanla, *Interiors: A Black Woman's Healing in Progress* (1995) [Part I](#) and [Part III](#)
- ([Part II](#) is optional)
- [V] Willis, Mikki, *Spiritual Liberation: Fulfilling Your Soul's Potential* (2009) (**New Thought**) [**Course Media Gallery**]

(07/03)

- Vanzant, Iyanla, *Interiors: A Black Woman's Healing in Progress* (1995) [Part IV](#)
- [V] "Osun-Osogbo," *Sacred Journeys with Bruce Feiler* (2014) [<https://vimeo.com/163696391>] (**Yoruba Priestess Initiation**)

#### WEEK 4

##### **African American Christianity and Buddhism**

(07/08)

- **GUEST VISITOR:** Prof. [George Yancy](#), Dartmouth College Montgomery Fellow
- **PICK ONE READING:** Yancy, George, and bell hooks, "[bell hooks: Buddhism, the Beats and Loving Blackness](#)," *The New York Times Opinion Pages: The Stone*, December 10, 2015 ([PDF here](#)); Yancy, George, "[Is Your God Dead?](#)" *The New York Times Opinion Pages: The Stone*, June 19, 2017 ([PDF here](#))
- Willis, Jan, *Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist, and Buddhist – One Woman's Spiritual Journey* (2001), [Part I](#), [Part II](#), and [Part III](#)

(07/10)

- Willis, Jan, *Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist, and Buddhist – One Woman's Spiritual Journey* (2001), [Part IV](#) and [Part V](#)
- [V] Phillips, Jenny, Anne Marie Stein, and Andrew Kukura, *The Dhamma Brothers: East Meets West in the Deep South* (2010) (**Buddhism**) [**Course Media Gallery**]

#### WEEK 5

##### **African American Islam**

(07/15)

- Tate, Sonyrea, *Little X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam* (1997), [Introduction to the 2005 Edition - Ch. 7](#)

(07/17)

- Tate, Sonyrea, *Little X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam* (1997), [Ch. 8 - Epilogue](#)
- [V] Grewal, Zareena, *By the Dawn's Early Light: Chris Jackson's Journey to Islam* (2004) (<https://religionresearch.org/closer/2017/05/05/zareena-grewal-by-the-dawns-early-light-chris-jacksons-journey-to-islam/>) [**available online**]

**\*\*PROSPECTUS DUE 07/19\*\***

WEEK 6

### African American Theological Openness

(07/22)

- The RZA, *The Tao of Wu* (2009), [Foreword - p. 99](#)
- [V] KRS-One, *The Temple of Hip Hop Introduction* (2018) [[KRS-One: The Temple of Hip Hop Introduction](#)] (**Hip Hop Religion**)
- [V] KRS-One, *The Temple of Hip Hop* (2015) [[KRS One - The Temple of Hip Hop](#)] (**Hip Hop Religion**)

(07/24)

- The RZA, *The Tao of Wu* (2009), [p. 100 - end](#)
- [V] Gayle Gilman and Jeff Swimmer, *The Church of Saint Coltrane* (1996) [<https://vimeo.com/155985592>] (**African Orthodox Christianity**)
- [V] 4:3 Feature Films, *ASHRAM: The Spiritual Community of Alice Coltrane* (2019) [[ASHRAM: The Spiritual Community of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda | 4:3 Feature Films](#)] (**Vedantic Hinduism**)

**RECOMMENDED** - Felicia M. Miyakawa, "[The Five Percenter 'Way of Life'](#)," in *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*, ed. Monica R. Miller and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2015), 197-212.

WEEK 7

### African American Religious Leadership, Song, and Sexuality

(07/29)

- Bean, Carl (Archbishop), *I Was Born This Way: A Gay Preacher's Journey through Gospel Music, Disco Stardom, and a Ministry in Christ* (2010), [Prologue - Baby Boy](#)
- [V] Bishop Carlton Pearson, *A Test of Faith* (2018) (**Unitarianism, New Thought, Religion and Sexuality**) [available via [Amazon Prime](#)]

(07/31)

- Bean, Carl (Archbishop), *I Was Born This Way: A Gay Preacher's Journey through Gospel Music, Disco Stardom, and a Ministry in Christ* (2010), [Too Close To Heaven - Grace and Mercy](#)
- [V] Ian L. Haddock, *OutCry the Mini Documentary* (2019) (**Religion and Sexuality**) [available via [Amazon Prime](#)]

**\*\*WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE 08/02\*\***

WEEK 8

### **African American Humanism, Agnosticism, and Atheism**

(08/05)

- Pinn, Anthony B., *Writing God's Obituary: How a Good Methodist Became a Better Atheist* (2014), [Preface - Ch. 7](#)

(08/07)

- Pinn, Anthony B., *Writing God's Obituary: How a Good Methodist Became a Better Atheist* (2014), [Ch. 8 - Ch. 17](#)
- [V] Generation Xero Films, *Stray from the Flock: A Story of a Black Atheist* (2016) [[Stray From The Flock: Story Of A Black Atheist \[FULL MOVIE\]](#)] (**African American Atheism**)

WEEK 9

### **African American Religion and Mental Wellness**

(08/12)

- Coleman, Monica A., *Bipolar Faith: A Black Woman's Journey with Depression and Faith* (2016), [Ch. 4, "Faith in God" - Ch. 13, "Dinah Project"](#)
- **(Ch. 1 - Ch. 3 is optional)**
- [V] Gibbons, Anika, *Journey to Liberation: The Legacy of Womanist Theology and Womanist Ethics at Union Theological Seminary* (2014) [[Journey to Liberation: The Legacy of Womanist Theology](#)] (**Afro-Protestant Women Religious Leadership**)



(08/14)

- Coleman, Monica A., [Bipolar Faith: A Black Woman's Journey with Depression and Faith](#) (2016), Ch. 14, "The Dance" - Ch. 22, "Free"
- [V] Womanist Institute, *What Manner of Woman* (2012) ([What Manner Of Woman - A Short Documentary Film](#)) (**Afro-Protestant Women Religious Leadership**)

**\*\*POTENTIAL THESIS STATEMENT + OUTLINE DUE 08/16\*\***

WEEK 10

### **African American Spirituality, Interrupted; and Conclusion**

(08/19)

- *PBS NewsHour*, [Michael Brown's funeral service | August 25, 2014](#)
- McSpadden, Lezley, with Lyah Beth LeFlore, *Tell the Truth & Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown* (New York: Regan Arts, 2016), [selected chapters](#).

(08/21)

- TBD

**\*\*FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE 08/27 AT 5PM EST\*\***

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### **Documentaries on Religious Journeys**

- 4:3 Feature Films, *ASHRAM: The Spiritual Community of Alice Coltrane* (2019) [[ASHRAM: The Spiritual Community of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda | 4:3 Feature Films](#)] (**Vedantic Hinduism**)
- Blake, John, *Black Church, Inc.: Prophets for Profit* (2015) (**Afro-Protestant Prosperity and Prophetic Traditions**)
- Amazon, *Bishop Carlton Pearson: A Test of Faith* (2018) (**Unitarianism, New Thought, Religion and Sexuality**)
- Generation Xero Films, *Stray from the Flock: A Story of a Black Atheist* (2016) [[Stray From The Flock: Story Of A Black Atheist \[FULL MOVIE\]](#)] (**African American Atheism**)
- Gibbons, Anika, *Journey to Liberation: The Legacy of Womanist Theology and Womanist Ethics at Union Theological Seminary* (2014) ([Journey to Liberation: The Legacy of Womanist Theology](#)) (**Afro-Protestant Women Religious Leadership**)
- Gayle Gilman and Jeff Swimmer, *The Church of Saint Coltrane* (1996) [<https://vimeo.com/155985592>] (**African Orthodox Christianity**)

- Grewal, Zareena, *By the Dawn's Early Light: Chris Jackson's Journey to Islam* (2004) (<https://religionresearch.org/closer/2017/05/05/zareena-grewal-by-the-dawns-early-light-chris-jacksons-journey-to-islam/>)
- Haddock, Ian L., *OutCry the Mini Documentary* (2019) (**Religion and Sexuality**)
- Main, Ronald G., *The Leah Daughtry Story: A Woman of Faith and Politics* (2008) (**Pentecostalism and Politics, Dartmouth alumna**)
- "Osun-Osogbo," *Sacred Journeys with Bruce Feiler* (2014) (<https://vimeo.com/163696391>) (**Yoruba Priestess Initiation**)
- Philipides, Nicholas, and Ben Schuder, *The Village of Peace* (2014) (**Hebrew Israelites**)
- Phillips, Jenny, Anne Marie Stein, and Andrew Kukura, *The Dhamma Brothers: East Meets West in the Deep South* (2010) (**Buddhism**)
- Willis, Mikki, *Spiritual Liberation: Fulfilling Your Soul's Potential* (2009) (**New Thought**)
- Womanist Institute, *What Manner of Woman* (2012) ([What Manner Of Woman - A Short Documentary Film](#)) (**Afro-Protestant Women Religious Leadership**)

**Additional Memoirs** (options for research papers) (available in Baker Reserves)

- Adiele, Faith, *Meeting Faith: An Inward Odyssey* (2004) (**Buddhism**)
- Arceneaux, Michael, *I Can't Date Jesus: Love, Sex, Family, Race, and Other Reasons I've Put My Faith in Beyoncé* (2018) (**Religion and Sexuality**)
- Bailey, Cornelia Walker, with Christena Bledose, *God, Dr. Buzzard, and the Bolito Man: A Saltwater Geechee Talks about Life on Sapelo Island* (2000) (**Gullah/Geechee Religion**)
- Gray, Ahuvah, *My Sister the Jew* (2001) (**Orthodox Judaism**)
- Green, Doris, *Don't Wait Until the Battle is Over: Shout Victory Now!* (2017) (**Prison Ministry**)
- Jones, Alex, *No Price Too High: A Pentecostal Preacher Becomes Catholic* (2006) (**Roman Catholicism**)
- Knight, Gladys, *Between Each Line of Pain and Glory: My Life Story* (1997) (**Mormonism**)
- McSpadden, Lezley, with Lyah Beth LeFlore, *Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown* (2016) (**Protestant Christianity**)
- Moore, Darnell L., *No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black and Free in America* (2018) (**Religion and Sexuality**)
- Muhammad, Ibtihaj, with Lori L. Tharps, *Proud: My Fight for an Unlikely American Dream* (2018) (**Islam**)
- Obama, Barack, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995/2004) (**Liberal Protestantism**)
- Reese, Della, *Angels Along the Way: My Life with Help from Above* (1997) (**New Thought**)

**Bibliography** (additional sources for your research)

**Highlighted** = Baker Reserves

- Azaransky, Sarah, *This Worldwide Struggle: Religion and the International Roots of the Civil Rights Movement* (2017)
- Best, Wallace D., *Langston's Salvation: American Religion and the Bard of Harlem* (2017)
- Bowler, Kate, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (2013)
- Cannon, Katie G., and Anthony B. Pinn, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of African American Theology* (2014)
- Casselberry, Judith., *The Labor of Faith: Gender and Power in Black Apostolic Pentecostalism* (2017)
- Cressler, Matthew J., *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migration* (2017)
- Curtis, Edward E., IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975* (2006)
- Floyd-Thomas, Juan, *The Origins of Black Humanism: Reverend Ethelred Brown and the Unitarian Church* (2008)
- Frederick, Marla F., *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith* (2003)
- Frederick, Marla F., *Colored Television: American Religion Gone Global* (2016)
- Hucks, Tracey E., *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (2012)
- Jackson, Jerma A., *Singing in My Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age* (2004)
- Lamore, Eric D., ed., *Reading African American Autobiography: Twenty-First-Century Contexts and Criticism* (2017)
- Lofton, Kathryn, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (2011)
- Manigault-Bryant, LeRhonda S., *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music and Lived Memory among Gullah/Geechee Women* (2014)
- Martin, Lerone A., *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (2014)
- Miller, Monica R., *Religion and Hip Hop* (2013)
- Miller, Monica R., and Anthony B. Pinn, eds., *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader* (2015)
- Miller, Monica R., Anthony B. Pinn, and Bernard 'Bun B' Freeman, eds., *Religion in Hip Hop: Mapping the New Terrain in the US* (2015)
- Prentiss, Craig R., *Staging Faith: Religion and African American Theater from the Harlem Renaissance to World War II* (2013)
- Raboteau, Albert J., *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (1995)
- Savage, Barbara D., *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion* (2008)
- Taylor, Ula Y., *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (2017)
- Tucker-Worgs, Tamelyn N., *The Black Megachurch: Theology, Gender, and the Politics of Public Engagement* (2011)
- Turner, Richard B., *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 2nd ed. (1997/2003)
- Weisenfeld, Judith, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (2017)