

ADV. TOPICS IN AMERICAN RELIGION (RELS 370)  
**COLONIALISM, FREEDOM,  
& AFRICAN AMERICAN  
RELIGIONS, 1500-2018**

**Spring 2018 | TR 10:50-12:05  
MYBK 119**

Freedom is an ironic idea in African American religious history. The concept was forged in an age of colonial conquest & slavery. At the same time, the quest for freedom from white supremacy has birthed many a Black religious movement. What is “freedom” and how is it connected to colonialism? What can the study of African American religion teach us about freedom struggles? And, to quote Black Lives Matter activists, “How do we get free?” This upper-level seminar will explore religions across the Black diaspora & engage a variety of sources, from W.E.B. Du Bois’s “souls of white folk” to Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Black Panther*.

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# COLONIALISM, FREEDOM, AND AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGIONS

(RELS 370: Adv. Topics in American Religion)

TR 10:50AM-12:05PM (MYBK 119)

## CONTACT

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## DESCRIPTION

Freedom is an ironic idea in African American religious history. African American Studies scholar Eddie Glaude defines the category "African American religion" as a practice of freedom in the midst of white supremacy. At the same time, the very concept of freedom was forged in an age of empires, colonial conquest, and transatlantic slavery. What is "freedom" and how is it connected to colonialism? What can the study of African American religions teach us about freedom struggles in the past and in the present? This upper-level seminar will explore these questions (and more) through close readings of primary sources and contemporary scholarship at the intersection of African American Studies and Religious Studies. The course will cover an array of religions across the African diaspora ranging from Yoruba traditions, Voodoo, and conjure to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

## OBJECTIVES

- 1) Introduce "religion" and "race" as modern constructed categories
- 2) Interrogate the relationship between "freedom" and "colonialism"
- 3) Situate African American religions and freedom struggles in the context of colonialism
- 4) Engage and imagine possible worlds beyond the confines of present circumstances
- 5) Hone your critical reading, thinking, and writing skills through disciplined engagement with texts, constructive conversation with classmates, and creative/writing projects

## EVALUATION

### 20% Attendance and Participation

- This is a seminar and, as such, most of our time will be spent in discussion.
- If you are worried about participation, meet with me (ASAP) to strategize.
- Quality counts more than quantity, but you must speak to contribute.
- You cannot participate if you are not present.

### 15% Discussion Board

- You will post on our OAKS discussion board by 11:59PM prior to each class.
- Your post should do two things:
  - Rearticulate the reading's most important point in your own words.
  - Pose a question for further discussion that the reading raises for you.
- Your posts will be graded on the following scale:
  - ✓ (100%)
  - ✓ - (75%)
  - (0%)

- Please read your peers' posts in preparation for class.
- 15% Discussion Leaders
- Each of you will be assigned to a small group.
  - Your small group will lead one class discussion on JOHNSON.
  - You will meet with me the preceding week to prepare your discussion.
  - You should come with an outline of the argument and questions to discuss.
- 10% Critical Analysis Essay
- You will write a 4-5 page (double-spaced, 12-point font) essay that analyzes a primary source in light of its corresponding chapter in JOHNSON.
  - Your essay will be due on the day assigned to your small group.
- 10% Field Trip Essay
- You will write a 4-5 page (double-spaced, 12-point font) essay analyzing your own experiences at Oyotunji African Village in light of our course.
  - It is due one week after our trip to Oyotunji.
- 30% Freedom Dreaming Un/Essay: your final assignment will be to either write an essay (8-10 pages) or create an unessay (project + 4-5 page creator's statement) that places an artist or activist in dialogue with the questions and themes of the course.
- Meet with me to your subject (5%) by Tuesday, February 27.
  - Submit your un/essay proposal (5%) by Tuesday, April 3.
  - Your final project (20%) is due by Tuesday, May 1.

#### REQUIRED

Since our collective success in this class depends on careful and critical reading of all assigned materials, it is imperative that you have your own physical copies of all texts. I expect you to actively engage the texts (underline arguments, star key points, write exasperated comments in the margins, etc.) while reading outside of class and to bring them with you to class to facilitate discussion.

There are four required books and one required musical recording. All the books are available from the CofC Bookstore. As long as you're able to listen to *Hamilton* in its entirety, I do not mind what medium you use. All other readings will be posted our OAKS site (under Content). Please print them and bring hard copies with you to class when necessary. You will receive a 0 for attendance if you fail to bring your assigned material on any given class day. Digital copies are prohibited without permission of professor (see Technology policy below). Books are on reserve in the library, but to actively engage library copies you will need to photocopy them. If cost is a concern, please see me.

- Sylvester A. **JOHNSON**, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates & Brian Stelfreeze, **BLACK PANTHER: A Nation Under Our Feet, Books 1-3** (Marvel Comics, 2016-2017)
- Lin-Manuel Miranda, **HAMILTON: An American Musical (Original Cast Recording)**

## RECOMMENDED

Since this is an advanced topics course, I encourage you to read beyond what is required of you. To that end, I have listed three books as recommended. Glaude is highly recommended for students who have not already taken RELS 270: African American Religion. We will read excerpts of both Kelley and Taylor this semester, but the entire books are worth reading.

- Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Tradition* (2002)
- Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (2014)
- Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter To Black Liberation* (2016)

EXPECTATIONS (we will craft these in class together)

### **For Me:**

### **For You:**

## ATTENDANCE AND LATE POLICIES

- You can only participate in our class if you are physically present, so attendance is essential to success. I will take attendance daily. If you miss more than five classes you will fail and be dropped from the class.
- Class begins promptly at 10:50AM on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I expect you to be seated and prepared for class when the proverbial iPhone strikes 10:50. Points will be deducted if you arrive late or leave before the end of class.
- Assignments are due at the time specified on the assignment itself. Any assignment turned in after the designated deadline is considered late. You will be penalized one letter grade (10 points) for each day that your assignment is late. Days are calculated by 24-hour periods that begin with the original due date and time.
- No one is more sympathetic to the busyness of our curricular and co-curricular schedules than I am (I have a wife, three daughters, a dog, after all). Nevertheless, it is crucial that we all learn to plan ahead and balance our respective responsibilities. Deadlines for other classes and other prior commitments are not acceptable excuses for missed class or late work.
- The same goes for technological problems. We are increasingly dependent on our devices and other technologies. However, as I know you know, technology can fail us. Computers crash, iPads break, servers are sometimes down, etc. Again, though I am sympathetic, technical difficulties are not acceptable excuses for late assignments or missed class. I expect you to complete assignments well enough in advance to factor in these variables and remember, always (ALWAYS!) back up your documents!!!

## TECHNOLOGY

Students are expected to have a CofC email address linked to OAKS that they check regularly. Email is my most frequent and effective means of communication.

Please turn your cellphones on silent when you enter the classroom. Use of cellphones is strictly prohibited and will result in a 0 for attendance.

I prefer that you use paper and pen/cil as your note-taking devices (crayons and markers also acceptable). If you prefer to take notes on a laptop or tablet, I ask that you sign an agreement with me for responsible use and that you sit in the rear of the classroom, so as not to distract your classmates. If your use of devices disrupts our class, I reserve the right to embarrass you and/or ask you to leave. (Please see me if and when you wish to sign an agreement.)

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change with advance notice)

### **INTRODUCTION**

Week 1 – What is this course?

Tuesday, January 9

Thursday, January 11

JOHNSON, Introduction and Conclusion (14 pp.)

Week 2 – “Freedom” and Freedom

**Monday, January 15: Martin Luther King Day**

**Sekou, “Martin Luther King’s Radical Legacy” – OAKS**

Tuesday, January 16

Patterson, “Freedom, Slavery, and the Modern Construction of Rights” (36 pp.)

Thursday, January 18

Loorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” (4 pp.) – OAKS

Kelley, “‘When History Sleeps’: A New Beginning” (12 pp.) – OAKS

### **(UN)FREEDOM**

Week 3 – Race, Religion, and Colonialism

Tuesday, January 23

West, “Ignoble Paradox of Modernity” (4 pp.) – OAKS

Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk” (16 pp.) – OAKS

Thursday, January 25

Baldwin, “White Racism or World Community?” (7 pp.) – OAKS

**Thursday, January 25: Dr. Clifton Granby Comes to Campus**

Week 4 – Colonial Governance and Religious Subjectivity

Tuesday, January 30

JOHNSON, Chapter 3 (49 pp.)

Thursday, February 1

Equiano, “Traditional Ibo Religion and Culture” (6 pp.) – OAKS

**Thursday, February 1 at 6:30PM – “The First 365: Analyzing the First Year of the Trump Administration,” moderated by MSNBC’s JoyAnn Reid**

Week 5 – Democracy and Myth

Tuesday, February 6

*HAMILTON*

Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story” (VIDEO) – OAKS

Thursday, February 8

Monteiro, "Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*" (10 pp.) – OAKS

Responses to "Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*" – OAKS

### **FREEDOM STRUGGLES**

Week 6 – White Revolution and Black Settler Colonialism

Tuesday, February 13

Johnson, Chapter 4 (49 pp.)

**Group #1: Discussion Leaders**

Thursday, February 15

VISIT: Avery Center in Exile (Addlestone Library, Rm. 360)

### **FIELD TRIP: Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* (2018)**

Week 7 – Black Theology and White Redemption

Tuesday, February 20

JOHNSON, Chapter 5 (61 pp.)

**Group #2: Discussion Leaders**

Thursday, February 22

Cooper, "Ethics of the Negro Question" (10 pp.) – OAKS

**Group #4: Critical Analysis Due**

Week 8 – Anti-Colonialism and State Repression

Tuesday, February 27

JOHNSON, Chapter 6 (51 pp.)

**Group #3: Discussion Leaders**

Thursday, March 1

F.B.I., "Moorish Science Temple of America" – OAKS

**Groups #1-2: Critical Analysis Due**

Week 9 – Counterintelligence and the "Negro Rebellion"

Tuesday, March 6

JOHNSON, Chapter 7 (51 pp.)

**Group #4: Discussion Leaders**

Thursday, March 8

King, "Beyond Vietnam" – OAKS

**Group #3: Critical Analysis Due**

### **FREEDOM DREAMS**

Week 10 – Wakanda and Democratic Dreams

Tuesday, March 13

*BLACK PANTHER*, Books 1-2

Thursday, March 15

*BLACK PANTHER*, Book 3

**Monday, March 19 – Friday, March 23: NO CLASS (Spring Break)**

Week 11 – Oyotunji and Yoruba Dreams

Tuesday, March 27

Long, “What is Africa to Me?” (17 pp.) – OAKS

**Tuesday, March 27: Dr. Simran Singh Comes to Campus**

Thursday, March 29

Hucks, “Oyotunji African Village” (58 pp.) – OAKS

**FIELD TRIP: Oyotunji African Village**

Week 12 – #BlackLivesMatter and Dreams of Black Liberation

Tuesday, April 3

Taylor, “Black Lives Matter: A Movement, Not a Moment” (37 pp.) – OAKS

Thursday, April 5

Taylor, Introduction to *How We Get Free* [excerpts] (14 pp.) – OAKS

“The Combahee River Collective Statement” – OAKS

Week 13 – #BlackLivesMatter and Dreams of Black Liberation

Tuesday, April 10

“A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, Justice” – OAKS

Cullors, Khan, and Alhassen, “No Ban, No Walls, No Prison, No Cops” – OAKS

**Thursday, April 12: NO CLASS**

Week 14 – Ferguson and Freedom Dreams

Tuesday, April 17

Sekou, “The Liberation Theology of Ferguson” (VIDEO) – OAKS

Thursday, April 19

Kelley, “‘When History Wakes’: A New Beginning” (4 pp.) – OAKS

Final Project Due: Tuesday, May 1 (11:00AM)