

AFA 3356 African American Religion : Introduction to African American Religion  
Fall 2024

Classes Begin:8/22/24 - 12/04/24

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& by Appointment

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Location:

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MWF Period 6: (12:50-1:40)

**Course Description & Objectives:**

This course is designed to give the student a coherent, interdisciplinary understanding of the African American religious experience from the beginning of the African sojourn here in North America until the present. This understanding, by necessity, must be grounded in some knowledge of the enslaved Africans concept of the sacred before they were snatched from their moorings and transported to the Americas. As Mechal Sobel a scholar of African American religion has written:

*.... Africans brought their worldviews into North America, where in an early phase of slavery, the core understandings, or Sacred Cosmos, at the heart of these worldviews coalesced into one neo-African consciousness- basically similar yet already significantly different from West African understandings. (Mechal Sobel, Trabelin' On.)*

African American Religious Studies refers to the investigation, analysis, and ordering of a wide variety of data related to the religious beliefs and practices of persons of African descent. We will examine the system of sacred symbols that African people have passed down from generation to generation, which have given meaning and direction to their lives in this hemisphere and the Caribbean for more than 400 years.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- To provide the student with an understanding of African values and ideas and their transmission and early developments in the Americas.
- To provide the student with information about African American religious expressions as they developed during slavery and how it has evolved since that period.
- To provide the student with information about African American religious connection to social activism.
- To provide the student with information on the “how” and “why” of African Americans almost wholesale adoption of Christianity.
- To explore the history of Islam and other religious traditions (Voodoo & Rastafarianism for example) in the African American religious experience.
- To explore the role of the quest for freedom and equality in the development of African American religious thought in all of its permutations.
- To explore the impact of African American religion upon mainstream Christianity and Islam.

**Required Course Materials:**

David Musa, African-American Religion: A Confluent of African Traditional Religion and Christianity Kindle Edition, (ISBN: 978-1-5049-1368-3)

**Additional readings that will be posted and discussed during class time.**

- 1). Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long Hidden Realities of the First Years*, Grand Rapids Mi.: William B. EERDMANS Publishing Company, 2004. (pbk)
- 2). Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978. (pbk)

Additionally, we will read chapters from the following books that will be sent to you as a pdf via our e-mail Class List. They are:

Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

Cain Hope Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class and Family*, Maryknoll: Orbis Press 1989.

James H. Cone, *Liberation: A Black Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990.

In addition to our readings, we will view numerous documentaries and films during the term. These films and documentaries are a significant part of the course and greatly enhance our understanding of African American religious traditions.

Documentaries to be view include segments from the “*This Far By Faith*” documentary series, and some of the “*Eyes on the Prize*” series as time permits. Additionally, I want us to watch as a class, the film, “Malcolm X”, and the film “Boycott” as well as the documentary, “From Memphis to Montgomery.”

Because of the heavy film content of this class, we may need to schedule several extra class meeting times, when everyone can be present to view these feature length films. Viewing these films is a part of the assignment for this class. **During the second or third class, a sheet will be distributed where everyone will state the day and time that we can meet to watch a movie for 90 minutes three times during the term to watch these feature length films. (This means a time when you do not have other classes or work.) Evenings are ok or even on a weekend if possible for me.**

We will visit Spring Hill Baptist Church. It is part of the largest Protestant denomination of black Americans in the US, contemporarily or we will visit an African Methodist Episcopal church, (the first independent black church in the U.S.) as the founding of this denomination is such an important part of African American Christianity and African theological liberation. To experience an African American church service is an important part of learning about the religious life of black people in America. I would also like for us to experience a traditional African religious ceremony which still has small followings in large metropolitan areas of the country but this is often difficult to find in a small city like Gainesville due to its small number of non-Christian African American religious communities. If I learn of the possibility of our participating in such an event, I will inform the class. Alternately, I may be able to find a film of such a service. We will see clips

of the Nation of Islam – the black nationalist Muslim group, which is still active here in the states, in parts of Europe and in the Caribbean

**Required Writing Assignments for the semester:**

1). **Four Reflection Papers:** This is a reading intensive course with no tests, quizzes or exams. **Each student will prepare four reflection papers on four of the assigned readings during the term.** You will select your dates from the **Course Outline** (*this is a separate document which lists the readings and other activities for each class. It will posted on Canvas*). These **Four Reflection Papers** **account for 40% of your grade.**

Also, **each student will serve as class facilitator for one class period** where you will lead the class discussion. This should be one of the dates on which you are writing a Reflection Paper. You will also need a hand-out for the class which can be a Power Point Presentation, an outline of the Readings or a prepared lecture. When facilitating our class discussion, you are to do as you will do in your written Reflection Paper: Present the key ideas in the readings; Additionally, you should prepare questions for the class from those readings; and each presenter should be prepared to answer questions from your class mates about the assigned reading for that date. I will assist you in this class facilitation. **One class facilitation accounts for 10% of your grade.**

A sign-up sheet will be circulated at our second class where you will sign up for both the Four Reflection Paper dates you will write during the term and the date on which you wish to serve as the facilitator. In some cases, there may be more than one person signing up to make their oral report on the same date. In which case, I will work with you to select another date for your class facilitation.

I will provide written **Guidelines for your Reflection Papers** via e-mail.

2). **Group Research Project & Research Paper:** Members of the class will decide on a group research project they would like to do research on with other members of the class. This Research Project will result in each member of the group writing an end of term minimum 10 page paper on some aspect of the Group's Topic. In the third meeting of the class, the class is to divide into Interest Groups. Some Suggested Topics for these interest groups could include but are not limited to the following:

- *The history and practice of African Traditional Religions in the U.S. such as Voodun, Santeria, and Condomble.*
- *The Rastafarian Religion, its origins and practice in the U.S.*
- *The history and contemporary significance of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*
- *The National Black Baptist Churches*
- *The Role of Religion in the Civil Rights Movement*
- *Bishop Richard Allen and the Free African Society*
- *The Nation of Islam*
- *Mr. Elijah Muhammad*
- *Malcolm X and his impact on Islam*
- *Role of Women in the Black Church*
- *Black Hebrew Congregations in the U.S.*
- *The Pentecostal Church and African Americans*

You are free to come up with another suggestion for a group and if at least two people are interested, this meets the criteria for an Interest Group. We will discuss the Interest Group and the Final Research Project in class. I will provide written Guidelines for the Final Research Paper. Your participation in The Interest Group and your individual Research Paper will account for 30% of your grade.

3). Participation in the Class Trip to an African American Religious Service will account for 10% of your grade.

To Recap - Grades will be based on the following:

• Four (4) page reflection papers–	<b>40%</b>
• Facilitation of one class with handout	<b>10%</b>
• Group Project with End of Term Research Paper	<b>30%</b>
• One Class Trip to an African American Church	<b>10%</b>
• Overall Class Participation	<b>10%</b>
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• Total	<b>100%</b>

### **Grading Scale:**

A 93-100, A- 90-92, B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82, C+ 77-79, C 73-76, C- 70-72, D+ 68-70, D 63-67, D- 60-62, E 59 and below

For information on the grading scale, see either [HTTP://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html](http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html) or [HTTP://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/](http://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/)

[regulationgrades.html](#). A C- will not be a qualifying grade for major, minor, Gen Ed, Gordon Rule or College Basic Distribution credit.

**Grades and Grading Policies:** The Office of the University Registrar records student grades. The word credit refers to one semester hour, generally representing one hour per week of lecture or two or more hours per week of laboratory work.

**Link:** <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/academic-progress-policies/>

**Course Policies:** (Policies adapted from <http://ufonline.ufl.edu/academics/>)

You should expect to devote as much time to this class as traditional on-campus students spend on their course work. This means that in addition to time spent on Canvas participating in online activities, students should expect to spend at least 3 hours of study time per credit hour per week. This includes reading materials (textbooks, eTexts, etc.), problem sets, researching and writing papers, and other assignments from your course instructor.

There are also documentaries and films that accompany each weekly module. It is imperative that you view this material as students will be tested on this information too.

**Attendance Policy:** While you have the flexibility to "attend" class whenever you have time, I encourage you to log in daily as well as sign up to receive Notifications from Canvas to ensure you stay abreast of all due dates and changes to the course.

**Communication:** Contact me through Canvas. I do my best to respond to your comments/emails in a timely manner during business hours (evenings are excluded). Allow 24 hours during the week for a response to course concerns/emails. Weekends, I do not check email, so it is imperative that you submit any questions to me before noon on Fridays. I will also set-up a Groupme for the class as well.

**Written work format and submission:**

All assignments should be

Written in standard English and demonstrate competence of grammar, sentence structure, and paragraph structure

**Typed, double-spaced** with Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, 1" margins

Information with your name, date, and course should be in the top corner, single-spaced, on the first page only or on a cover page

**All work must be properly documented. Students may use APA, MLA, or Turabian.**

I will provide feedback on all written assignments; these comments are intended to strengthen your writing skills. They should be taken as constructive feedback, as I am evaluating clarity, content, structure, and sources.

**Gordon Rule:** “The Writing Requirement (Gordon Rule) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning.” This is a Gordon Rule course with a 4000-word minimum writing requirement. Your writing will be evaluated and you will receive feedback on assignments that are intended to fulfill this writing requirement. You will be evaluated based on grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization. According to University policy, a C- will not be a qualifying grade for major, minor, Gen Ed, Gordon Rule or College Basic Distribution credit.

**Policy on late/make-up work:** Given the brevity of the term and the fact that all assignments are known well in advance, LATE WORK IS NOT ACCEPTED UNLESS THERE ARE EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES (i.e. death of a close family member or hospitalization). Documentation will be required to prove those circumstances.

**Academic Honesty:** UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Click here to read the Conduct Code. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.

**Extra Credit Policy:** Extra Credit opportunities are offered during the semester at the instructor’s discretion. Reference course modules for specific activities. All extra points earned will be added to a grade the lecturer selects at the end of the term.

**Accommodations:** Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center

(<https://disability.ufl.edu/>). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access

**GatorEvals:**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>

**Campus Resources:**

**Counseling and Wellness Center:** Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

**Student Health Care Center:** Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

**Library Support:** Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

**Teaching Center:** Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

**Writing Studio:** 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

**Course Expectations and Etiquette:**

Courteous and appropriate behavior is expected. Therefore, please be mindful that we are dealing with material that may be sensitive in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, violence, and/or political perspective.

By remaining enrolled in the course, you are agreeing to complete all assignments and participate during discussions. PLEASE KEEP THE DIALOG RESPECTFUL AND RELEVANT. I encourage students to keep an open mind, and I expect you to COMMUNICATE YOUR IDEAS WITHOUT HARSHLY OFFENDING YOUR PEERS. ALL ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES WILL BE RESPECTED BY THE INSTRUCTOR AND BY ALL CLASS MEMBERS AT ALL TIMES.



## **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

### **Course Outline August 22, 2024- December 4, 2024**

#### **Module/Week 1 August 26, 28, 30 2024**

**Stevenson, Introduction to African Traditional Religion**

**Reading:** African-American Religion: A Confluent of African Traditional Religion and Christianity, Chapter 1 (Pages 1-19)

#### **Module/Week 2 September 2,4,6, 2024 Labor Day 9/2/2024**

**Discussion, Stevenson, Introduction to African Traditional Religion**

**Reading:** African-American Religion: A Confluent of African Traditional Religion and Christianity, Chapter 1 (Pages 1-19)

#### **Module/Week 3 September 9,11,13, 2024**

**Reading:** Provenance And Proto-religion Of Africa Slaves in North America, Chapter 2 ( Pages, 21-64)

**Discussion:** Racism's influence on European religious values.

**Discussion:** Herskovitz, Myth of The Negro Past

#### **Module/Week 4 September 16,18,20, 2024**

**Reading:** Provenance And Proto-religion Of Africa Slaves in North America, Chapter 2 ( Pages, 21-64)

**Discussion:** Racism's influence on European religious values.

**Discussion:** Herskovitz, Myth of The Negro Past

#### **Module/Week 5 September 23,25,27, 2024**

**Reading:** The Process of Personal, And Problems In Solve Christianization, Chapter 3 (Pages, 66-98)

**Discussion:** Black Church Beginnings, Introduction: The role of Africanisms,(Pages xv-xvi)

#### **Module/Week 6 September 30, October 2,4, 2024**

**Reading:** The Process of Personal, And Problems In Solve Christianization, Chapter 3 (Pages, 66-98)

**Discussion:** Black Church Beginnings, Introduction: The role of Africanisms  
(Pages xv-xvi)

**Module/Week 7 October, 7,9,11, 2024**

**Discussion:** Introduction to: Rastafarianism, *A Journey to the Roots of Rastafari, ebook*

Islam, Bahai Faith and The Black Hebrews (Appiah and Gates,*Africana*)

**Review of the first seven weeks, readings and lectures.**

Islam, Bahai Faith and The Black Hebrews

**Module/Week 8 October, 14,16,18, 2024**

**Discussion:** Introduction to: Rastafarianism, *A Journey to the Roots of Rastafari, ebook*

Islam, Bahai Faith and The Black Hebrews (Appiah and Gates,*Africana*)

**Review of the first seven weeks, readings and lectures.**

**Module/Week 9. October, 21,23,25, 2024**

**Review of the first seven weeks, readings and lectures.**

**Module/Week 10. October, 28,30, November 1, 2024**

**Reading:**The Progress of The Slave Christianization, Chapter 4

**Discussion:**Examining the creative African influence on Christianity

**Module/Week 11 November, 4, 6, 8, 2024**

**Reading:**The Progress of The Slave Christianization, Chapter 4

**Discussion:**Examining the creative African influence on Christianity

**Module/Week 12 November 11, 13, 15, 2024**

**Research paper in class presentations begin.**

**Module/Week 13 November 18, 20, 22, 2024**

**Research paper in class presentations continue if necessary.**

**Module/Week 14 November 25, 27, 29, 2024 Thanksgiving 11/28/2024**

**Break, Break, Break.**

**Module/Week 15 December, 2,4,6, 2024**

**Final papers are due 12/6/2024**

**Module/Week 16 December, 9,22,13, 2024**  
**FINALS WEEK**

Last two weeks are wrap ups. This is a time catch up on any missed or late assignments.