

# African American Religion

Fall 2021

AFA3356

Undergraduate - Introduction to African American Religion

Meeting NRN-3035 (Norman Hall)

There are two Sections 1&2

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## **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 information about African American religious expression as it developed during slavery and how it has evolved since that period.
- 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:**

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)

3). Cain Hope Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class and Family*, Maryknoll New York, Orbis Press, 1989. (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.

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 we will 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 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. **At the second 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 is possible for me. ( Due to COVID 19 protocols, we will discuss this option later.)**

A class trip to an African American church in Gainesville is planned for this semester. We will either visit a Baptist Church because it is 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 ac-*

tivities for each class. It will be 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 have 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 you 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>  |
| Class presentation                                | <b>10%</b>  |
| Group Project with End of Term Research Paper     | <b>30%</b>  |
| One Class Trip to an African American Church TBD. | <b>10%</b>  |
| Overall Class Participation                       | <b>10%</b>  |
| <hr/>   |             |
| 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/minus-grades.html](http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minus-grades.html) or [HTTP://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html](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.

**Disability Statement:**

Students requiring accommodations must first register with the Dean of Student's Office, Disability Resource Center. The Dean of Student's office will provide documentation which the student will then give to the instructor.

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc>

## **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."* For more information on the honor code, see: <HTTP://www.dso.ufl.edu/SCCR/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

## **Attendance and Participation:**

We will attempt to cover a large amount of material during the term, therefore your participation and attendance in class are very important. You are **permitted two unexcused absences** without penalty. For each unexcused absence after the first two, you can lose up to 2 grade points from your cumulative grade. In addition, students must participate consistently to receive the entire 10%. You must read assignments before class and be prepared to discuss them on the day they are scheduled. For more information see the university's attendance policy at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

## **Excused absences and Missed Work**

In general, acceptable reasons for absence from class include an illness, a serious family emergency such as a death in the family, participate in a military obligation, religious holidays, or participate in a UF sports team, in the band, glee club, choir, orchestra. Please let me know in advance that you will be away from class and provide documentation.

Students will be allowed to make up missed work in the event of medical and other emergencies if the student(s) produces a valid doctor's statement or other documentation. The university's policy on illnesses, absences, and religious holidays can be found at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/1213/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

## **RECOMMENDED COVID 19 PROTOCOLS:**

In response to COVID-19, the following practices are in place to maintain your learning environment, to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions, and to further the health and safety of ourselves, our neighbors, and our loved ones.

If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available at no cost and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit this link for details on where to get your shot, including options that do not require an appointment: <https://coronavirus.ufhealth.org/vaccinations/vaccine-availability/>. Students who receive the first dose of the vaccine somewhere off-campus and/or outside of Gainesville can still receive their second dose on campus.

You are expected to wear approved face coverings at all times during class and within buildings even if you are vaccinated. Please continue to follow healthy habits, including best practices like frequent hand washing. Following these practices is our responsibility as Gators.

Sanitizing supplies are available in the classroom if you wish to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down and at the end of the class.

Hand sanitizing stations will be located in every classroom.

If you sick, stay home and self-quarantine. Please visit the UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website about next steps, retake the questionnaire and schedule your test for no sooner than 24 hours after your symptoms began. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 (or email [covid@shcc.ufl.edu](mailto:covid@shcc.ufl.edu)) to be evaluated for testing and to receive further instructions about returning to campus. UF Health Screen, Test & Protect offers guidance when you are sick, have been exposed to someone who has tested positive or have tested positive yourself. Visit the UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website for more information.

Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work.

If you are withheld from campus by the Department of Health through Screen, Test & Protect you are not permitted to use any on campus facilities. Students attempting to attend campus activities when withheld from campus will be referred to the Dean of Students Office.

Continue to regularly visit [coronavirus.UFHealth.org](https://coronavirus.UFHealth.org) and [coronavirus.ufl.edu](https://coronavirus.ufl.edu) for up-to-date information about COVID-19 and vaccination.