

**Rel 100:
What is African American Religion?**

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Course Overview: African Americans in the United States have made considerable contributions to the religious and social geography of this country. This class will explore the histories, traditions, and approaches to African American religions that have defined its contexts and contours.

This class focuses specifically on the African American religious experience. We will be focusing on the connection between race and religion in this course, and you will be challenged on how African Americans have contributed to and transformed various forms of religious expression.

Course Objectives: At the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Describe and articulate the theoretical core of African American religion
- Apply methodological approaches to the study of African American religion
- Gain a basic knowledge of different African American religious orientations

Required Text:

Anthony Pinn, *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion*

All other readings will be placed on blackboard.

Grading Breakdown: *What is African American Religion* will push you to articulate yourself clearly, creatively, and concisely in relation to the texts. With this in mind, there are four components to your grade:

Reflection papers, (2 papers, 30% of overall grade). Reflection papers (2-4 pages, double-spaced) are just what they sound like: reflections on the texts we will engage in class. For both papers, I will give a prompting question. A great reflection paper does the following three things:

- Starts with an introduction that has a clear and concise thesis statement
- Provides ample support for the thesis statement with references to the texts
- Provides a clear and reasonable critique of the text

- Explores new directions made possible by the text

Group Presentation (30%). In the beginning of the semester, you will break into groups, and each group will take a tradition (Christianity, Islam, Conjure, or Humanism) and present the readings to the class. A strong presentation includes three things: 1) a clear indication that you've read and reflected on the text; 2) a presentation of the orientation as it shows up in the real world; and 3) a sense of creativity and style.

Mixtape (30%). African American religion is strongly structured by music and performance. For your final project, you will develop a 6-track mixtape—a playlist of music, videos, speeches, or whatever media—that expresses your understanding of African American religion (you will upload this to YouTube, so that at least I can see it). Along with your physical mixtape, you will provide a written interpretation of your tracks, showing how each track exposes a new dimension about how you understand African American religion. (It sounds complicated, but I promise it's not).

Attendance (10%). When you miss, you not only deprive yourself; you also deprive your classmates of your perspective. With this in mind, *having more than 1 unexcused absence will result in a 0 for your attendance grade.*

Grading Breakdown:

Grades*	Grade points / credit*	Percentage Range	Total Points
A	4.0	95-100	95-100
A-	3.66	90-94	90-94
B+	3.33	86-89	86-89
B	3.0	83-85	83-85
B-	2.66	80-82	80-82
C+	2.33	76-79	76-79
C	2.0	73-75	73-75
C-	1.66	70-72	70-72
D⁺	1.0	65-69	65-69
D-	0.66	60-64	60-64
F	0	59 under	59 under

***Academic Integrity Policy**

Syracuse University's academic integrity policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on

attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. The presumptive penalty for a first instance of academic dishonesty by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of academic integrity policy. The presumptive penalty for a first instance of academic dishonesty by a graduate student is suspension or expulsion. SU students are required to read an online summary of the university's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/>.

Disability-Related Accommodations

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498, TDD: (315) 443-1371 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Diversity and Disability:

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. My goal is to create learning environments that are useable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, I invite any student to meet with me to discuss additional strategies beyond accommodations that may be helpful to your success.

Religious Observances Notification and Policy

SU religious observances notification and policy, found at <http://hendricks.syr.edu/spiritual-life/index.html>, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes and by the submission deadline for flexibly formatted classes.

For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available for students in **My Slice / StudentServices / Enrollment / MyReligiousObservances / Add a Notification**. Instructors may access a list of their students who have submitted a notification in My Slice Faculty Center.

Note on Language: we will be talking about religion and politics—which means everyone has an opinion. I welcome passionate and lively dialogue in my class—in fact, I expect it—but I will not tolerate hateful or discriminatory speech spoken in class or in

written assignments. There is a distinction between asking thoughtful questions and making problematic statements and arguments. If you make an argument for discrimination in your assignments, you will receive an "F" for that assignment. And if you continually use discriminatory or hateful speech during class discussion, you will fail the course.

Part one: History

Week one: Introduction/Overview

Tuesday, August 29: Introduction of the class

Thursday, August 31: Introducing African American Religion

Readings:

W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of the Faith of the Fathers"

Chance the Rapper, "Blessings"

Jay-Z and Kanye West, "No Church in the Wild"

Week 2: Is there ever a Beginning? Historical Context

Tuesday, September 5: Misunderstood

Readings:

Anthony Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*, 1-26

Nina Simone, "Misunderstood"

Lil' Wayne, "Dontgetit"

Thursday, September 7: Entrapment

Readings:

Anthony Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*, 27-51

Kanye West, "All Falls Down"

Kanye West, "Gorgeous"

Week 3: Broken Bodies: Conceptual Context

Tuesday, September 12: Rope Neckties

Readings:

Anthony Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*, 52-80

Nina Simone, "Strange Fruit"

Thursday, September 14: World-Making

Readings:

Anthony Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*, 133-156

D'Angelo and the Vanguard, "1000 Deaths"

Common, "The Corner"

Week 4: Complex Subjectivity: Theoretical Context (Reflection Paper Prompt #1 Given)

Tuesday, September 19: The question for Complex Subjectivity

Readings:

Anthony Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*, 157-179

Common, "Be"

Solange, "F.U.B.U."

Solange, "Weary"

Kendrick Lamar, "DNA"

Thursday, September 21: W/rap up Session

Part two: Approaches

Week 5: Philosophical Approaches

Tuesday, September 26: Cornel West

Readings: Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!* 5-10, 15-24, 69-91

Morehouse College, "We Shall Overcome":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aor6-DkzBJo>

Jay-Z, "The Story of OJ"

Thursday, September 28: Victor Anderson

Victor Anderson, *Creative Exchange*, 1-24

Shekinah Glory Ministry, "Yes"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYurqlr1E7g>

Week 6: History of Religion

Tuesday, October 3: Signifying, or What's in a Name?

Readings:

Charles Long, *Significations*, 1-11

"Your Name is Toby":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXjxTXZGJX4>

James Baldwin, "Who is the Nigger?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoL5fciA6AU&t=113s>

Thursday, October 5: How to Study Afam Religion (First Reflection Paper Due)

Reading:

Charles Long, *Significations*, 187-198

Week 7: Black Theology

Tuesday, October 10: Civil Rights and Theology

Readings:

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

"Intro to Selma,"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJDqucO5GCM&t=30s>

Thursday, October 12: Black Theology

Readings:

Pinn and Floyd-Thomas, *Liberation Theologies*, 15-36

"A Conversation with James Cone"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7NKXlmRvWE>

Janelle Monáe, "Hell you talk about"

Week 8: Womanist Theology and Ethics (Reflection Paper Prompt #2 given)

Tuesday, October 17: Womanist Theology

Readings:

Monica Coleman, *Making a Way out of no Way*, 11-44

"Womanism vs. Feminism"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fqXOWUQJMs>

"Journey to Liberation: the Legacy of Womanist Theology"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjhtUGqFCWg>

Thursday, October 19: Womanist Ethics

Reading:

Keri Day, *Unfinished Business*, 1-10; 15-30

Beyoncé Knowles, "Flawless" (both the original and remix)

Week 9: Sociology

Tuesday, October 24: Sociology, part one

Reading:

E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*, 7-51

Thursday, October 26: Sociology, part 2

Reading:

E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*, 50-71

Week 10: w/rap up

Tuesday, October 31: group meetings with professors

Thursday, November 2: group meetings with professors (Reflection Paper #2 due)

Part Three: Traditions/ Group Presentations

Week 11: Different Directions

Tuesday, November 7: Blacklivesmatter and Religion

Thursday, November 9: Father Divine Peace Mission Movement

Reading: TBD

Week 12: Christianity/Islam

Tuesday, November 14: Christianity Group Lecture

Thursday, November 16: Islam Group Lecture

November 21-26 Thanksgiving Break

Week 13: Conjure/Humanism

Tuesday, November 28: Conjure Group Lecture

Thursday, November 30: Humanism Group Lecture

Week 14: African Traditional Religions/W/rap up

Tuesday, December 5: ATR Group Lecture

Thursday, December 7: Semester w/rap up

