**African American Religious Culture**

**Spring 2015**

**AAST/REL 4100**

**Mary L. Keller, Ph. D.**

**307 250 1474 (8 a.m. – 5 p.m.)**

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**Bernard Stanley Hoyes, Dancing for the Lord**

**Course Description WC, D**

This course covers the comparative study of African American religious culture, primarily in the context of Afro-Christianity but touching on contemporary Vodou, Yoruba, Islam, Humanist traditions, Womanist theology and Hip Hop. The course moves through three historical eras: A. The African Diaspora and Slave Trade; B. Reconstruction to Civil Rights; and C. Contemporary varieties of African American religious culture. It is a writing intensive seminar and students will construct a final 12-15 page research paper in five stages during the class.

**What do the W3/WC and D requirements mean that you can expect from this course?**

Advanced writing courses provide students  the opportunity to refine their ability to communicate with academic or professional audiences through writing. In WC courses, students receive instruction about writing that includes the effective use of revision and editing processes to produce written work that conforms to the academic standards of the Humanities. Students engage in a substantial writing component that requires the use of appropriate research skills in order to provide the evidence for a thesis-driven argument.  WC courses help students to engage in an ongoing academic discussion in which the student marshals expert opinion to support claims that the student feels prepared to make with regard to their understanding of the material and the methodological issues involved.

This course fulfills the Diversity in the U.S. requirement in its examination of the diasporic roots of African American religious culture, its study of race and gender as they have impacted religious lives in the U.S., and its focus on the diversity of African American religious lives in contemporary U.S. culture, thus offering insight into how the diversity of cultural traditions of the United States have shaped and continue to shape identity and national experience.

**Prerequisites: WB and one of the following: AAST 1000 or any AAST 2000-level course or RELI 1000.**

**Course Aims**

* **To provide a historical context for African American Religious Culture from the slave trade, through Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement, to the variety of contemporary religious expressions found in Vodou, Islam, Humanism, Womanist theology and Hip Hop.**
* **To introduce the methodological challenges of studying African American religious cultures comparatively. How does one define what is and what is not religious?**
* **Learn and apply the academic definitions of religion and subjectivity used in this approach to the interdisciplinary study of religion.**
* **To develop research and writing skills through the use of peer writing workshops and multiple drafts of the final product for the course, a 12-15 page research paper with endnotes and bibliography.**

**While achieving these course objectives, we will fulfill the course outcomes for the USP 2015 COM 3.**

* Use the discourse of the interdisciplinary field of Religious Studies to communicate to academic audiences through written, oral, and digital communication.
* Find, analyze, evaluate, and document information from African American religious culture by completing a substantial communication project, a 12-15 page research paper.
* Recognize and evaluate more advanced aspects of communication, such as the use of the Norton Critical Anthology, and the capacity to entertain ideas that challenge your thesis. These aspects of communication respond to the purposes and needs of academic audiences.
* Make effective use of multiple drafts, revision, computer technology, peer and instructor comments, and collaboration to show understanding of communication standards. Through peer review that employs the Canvas technology for peer and instructor comments, students will experience both reviewing and being reviewed in multiple drafts of the research process.
* Observe the accepted conventions of spelling, grammar, organizational structure, punctuation, delivery and documentation expected in disciplinary, interdisciplinary, or professional contexts.
* Deliver presentations regarding our most provocative reading, James Cones’ “Black Theology” in a confident and professional manner, consistent with the standards of the interdisciplinary field of Religious Studies and African American and Diaspora Studies.
* Interact effectively with audience members, engage opposing viewpoints constructively, and demonstrate active listening skills as we concentrate on peer presentations of two chapters of Cones’ book.

**Expect to participate for six or more hours each week, reading and working with the material. Contact Prof. Keller if unforeseen events, health issues, or work schedules impede your ability to complete assignments. If I have good information ahead of time, and if you have established a good work ethic in the classroom, I can be humane and fair.**

**Course Readings**

**To purchase:**

**Olaudah Equiano,** *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written By Himself* **(Norton Critical Edition, W. W. Norton). ISBN 0-393-97494-4**

**W. E. B. Du Bois,** *The Souls of Black Folk* **(Dover Publications, Dover Thrift Editions, 1994). ISBN 0-486-28041-1**

**Anthony Pinn,** *Varieties of African American Religious Life* **(Beacon Press). ISBN 0-8006-2994-9**

**Available online in the class:**

**James Cone,** *A Black Theology of Liberation* **(Orbis Books, 1993).** Selections will be taken from the text and placed in the reserve reading selections for this class in the online Library.

**Katie G. Canon** “The Womanist Tradition.” Available in the reserve reading selections for this class in the online Library.

**Jane I. Smith,** “Chapter 4, Islam in the African American Community” in Islam in America (Columbia University Press, 1999). Available in the online reserve readings for the class.

**Other course readings will be available in the course modules.**



**There are 1000 points possible in this course, divided into two areas:**

1. **Weekly participation tasks = 450 points; and**
2. **The production of a final research paper in 5 Stages (550 points). Writing assignments are in Weeks 5, 9, and 12-15.**

**450 Participation points: discuss or quiz your way through the material.**

**{The points you earn in Week 1 will be extra credit points.}**

**9 weeks of the course offer the opportunity to earn up to 50 points per week (2,3,4,6,7,8, 10,11, 12).**

**Each of those weeks you will have two options for participation:**

**a) Take a 50 point quiz on the weekly reading material, or**

**b) Post no less than three times during the to two discussion questions, each question worth 25 points (see grading rubric below).**

**These two options are meant to address a variety of learning styles and schedules. You may select both options, but you will only receive up to 50 points. You may alternate from one week to the next which option you choose.**

**On working together:**

**At this point in the study of learning, understanding, creativity, and motivation, we know that humans are networked beings who thrive and become smarter by working together. I will offer the “chat” function on the left side bar of the class so that you can find others and discuss material in the online setting. Use the chat function to introduce your vocabulary words, your top three most important issues from the reading, etc. There’s nothing like presenting information to others to master the material, so the chat could become a place where you master the material while also learning from other people’s materials.**

**What we also know is that there are dominant characters that will exploit the hard work of others, and online environments have been known to attract predatory characters. Don’t get exploited for your hard work. Blame me if you need to wiggle out of collaborating with someone who is not collaborating : )**

**A. Quiz taking:**

**Network before taking the quiz, but not during. It is dishonest to work together while taking the quiz for this class. I will set the time limit for the quizzes to a very short time frame, thereby rewarding those who enter the quiz with the material memorized and prepared. Take the quiz alone. The time frame will be tight enough that you will be able to read the question, read all four answers, and make a swift choice.**

**B. Discussion threads:**

**Your first post will be blind; you will see no other posts until you have posted. As described in the 25 point rubric below,. By preparing your first post thoroughly, and then replying to engaging work by your peers, you ought to develop not only a successful academic style, but also a comprehensive understanding. Academic style means that you are drawing from the readings to substantiate your claims with evidence. I find that it is very refreshing to read the discussion posts because students find the best material to include in their posts, and reading your work refreshes the power of the material.**

**Grading the Discussion Threads:**

The discussion threads are the most interactive part of the course. If you want to engage with other people as part of what motivates you to learn, this is the place for you. At the beginning of the week, check out the discussion questions. They will help you to focus your note taking.

I have found that discussion threads are often *far more interesting* than many in-class discussions because we bring in supportive evidence very efficiently in the discussion threads. People are generally more thoughtful when they have the time to compose their thoughts, include direct quotations from the text, and summarize or conclude their ideas.

Note to the wise: By carefully developing your discussion thread posts throughout the semester, you could be laying down the foundation for your 12-15 page research paper.

In order to receive a passing grade for participating in the discussion threads, you must:

* Make your first post by Wednesday of the week.
* Your second post needs to be submitted by Sat. at midnight.
* Additional posts are encouraged.

Under each weekly unit you will find a link to the discussion. Each discussion has two topics and you must respond to both topics in order to get full credit, up to 25 points per topic. You might post one substantial response to one topic, and multiple times to the next topic. As long as you have substantively addressed each question at least once, you may pursue your interests as you produce your week’s worth of discussion.

You are encouraged to reply to other posts as this will help to round out your perspective. You can raise questions and develop your thoughts—this is where you are working the material in order to increase your understanding and develop your retention. You are "handing in" your work to the professor, so check each post to make sure it is coherent, informed, grammatically correct, and respectful in its tone.

I welcome engaged writing in which you are able to make connections to the readings based from your own experiences. I welcome rigorous discussion of elements from the texts that troubled you. Hence, while there is room for exploration and creativity in your discussion posts, the discussion threads are not like a chat room. Conventions of grammar must be followed to receive credit, and citation of resources is required.

**23-25** (92-100%) Equivalent to an A, reserved for particularly insightful comments that illustrate critical thinking, synthesis, or precise summary. The pursuit of extra peer-reviewed research (academic books or journals) will also boost your grade once the requirements for a B have been met. Students will provide a substantial answer (several developed paragraphs) for each question at least once during the week, and will participate no less than twice according to the deadlines on Wednesday and Saturday.

**20-22** (80-88%) Equivalent to a B, students will provide a substantial answer (several developed paragraphs) for each question at least once during the week, and will participate no less than twice according to the deadlines on Wednesday and Saturday. Correct punctuation and grammar are required. Each post needs to be relevant to the question and needs to refer to the expert opinion you have read in the assignments with page number or other citation when appropriate. Additional posts are welcome, especially if they raise areas of interest to you, promote lively discussion, or contribute additional web research you may have pursued.

**18-19** (72-76%) Equivalent to a C. You have clearly read the material, but your use of evidence from the material is general and very thin, and your expansion on the evidence is vague. Disorganized presentation and lack of focus in relating to the topic. Has not met the two weekly deadlines.

**15-17** – Equivalent to a D. You wrote something relevant, but it is unclear that you have understood the readings, your grammar and style are inadequate, you have not provided page numbers or other citation information.

**0 – 14** [Voice of Doom] Equivalent to an F. For those who make no relevant comments demonstrating knowledge of the reading assignments or if participation does not show significant effort to write grammatically correct sentences. Plagiarism will result in a 0, including unintentional plagiarism where you have pasted material from a website or other reference without identifying where your use of the material has begun. It is inadequate to write a paragraph and put a reference at the end of the paragraph. You need to identify either with a signal phrase and/or quotations the use of someone else’s words.

I will evaluate the posts at the end of each week, as quickly as possible. This weekly feedback helps you to learn my grading style quickly, and will provide you with direction for your research paper.

**Grading the Research Paper:**

**The “key product” for this class, worth 55% of your grade, is the research and writing of 12-15 page term paper with complete bibliography and footnotes or endnotes. Building up to that term paper, students will hand in a progression of the elements of the paper, each stage of which focuses on individual aspects of the research writing and process.**

1. **Week 5. 100 points (70 points for your paper, 15 points for each of 2 reviews). Write a three-page paper on the historical context of the African Diaspora with evidence from TIN and *Black Magic*. Provide a works cited. Font 11, spacing 1.5.**
2. **Week 9. 100 points. Three-page paper on “subjectivity” in 20th century African American religious culture.**
3. **Week 13. 100 points. Ten-page rough draft with works cited.**
4. **Week 14. 100 points. Two peer reviews.**
5. **Week 15. 100 points. 12-15 page final research paper that covers: historical context of slave trade, subjectivity in 20th century African American religious culture, focus topic on contemporary African American religious culture.**

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**Week 1** *Monday, Jan 26-Feb 1*

**Assignment: You will find this work by clicking on Module in the left side bar, and open Week 1 Module.**

1. **Read the Introduction to The Interesting Narrative (TIN), ix-xxxi.**
2. **Read Keller “Religion as Orientation.”**
3. **Participate on discussion thread, first post by Jan. 29, “Into the Text” 10 points (extra credit. The grade book will say it is worth 0 points so that it doesn’t mess up your percentage out of 1000 points total, but you’ll get the credit.) (0=didn’t post, 5=didn’t check spelling and didn’t refer to the course readings, 7=identified academic curiosity in course, general reference to Long, 8=precise reference to Long, no quotations or expansion, 9=Clearly identifies key issues from Long and Albanese, 10=shows mastery of Long and Albanese through use of quotation, expansion, synthesis).**
4. **Take simple quiz on syllabus and Orientation mini-lecture, repeatable, 10 points, (extra credit—again the grade book will say 0 points) due by Saturday night, Jan. 31.**

**Week 2** *Feb. 2 –Feb. 8*

**Assignment: Week 2 Module**

1. **Read TIN, 19-84; Chapters 1 – 5, skim 4. Pay special attention in Chapter 3 to the story of the Talking Book.**
2. **Read Henry Louis Gates, “The Trope of the Talking Book,” in TIN, 361-367. This is a fabulous, short essay that lays out the ground of postcolonial issues including “subjectivity,” “voice,” and the transition from orality to literature.**
3. **Quiz on intro to TIN, Keller lecture, TIN chapters, and Gates OR post to both discussion topics.**

**Week 3** *Feb. 9-15*

1. **Read TIN, chapters VII, X and XII.**
2. **Read Eva Beatrice Dykes, “Humanitarianism, John Wesley, and Gustavus Vassau,” TIN 210-216. This lays out an important piece of the historical context in which the idea of universal human rights to freedom were being developed at the same time that the lucrative rewards from slavery were being enjoyed by Europeans, creating a schizophrenic social conscience. Just what was the big revolution of 1789, the year TIN was published?**
3. **Quiz Or post to both discussion topics.**

**Week 4** *Feb 16- Feb 22*

1. **Assignment: Read Yvonne Chireau, “Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition” 1-6, 10-33. Available as pdf in doc sharing.**
2. **Quiz Or post to both discussion topics.**
3. **Select date on course calendar for your week 7 presentation. We will organize in small groups for those presentations.**

**Stage 1 for the final paper. Week 5,** *Feb. 23-March 1*

**100 points (70 points for your paper, 15 points for each of 2 reviews).**

**Write a three page paper on the historical context of the African Diaspora with evidence from TIN and Black Magic. Provide a works cited. Font 11, spacing 1.5.**

**Logic: In order to write a research paper for a class on African American Religious culture, you need to establish your mastery of the historical foundations. Every final paper, even if it focuses on Christian hip-hop in 2014, will begin by establishing the historical context of African American religious culture. Think of it this way—before you can describe a journey, you’ve got to start with the basic map. I expect that your final paper will contain at least three excellent paragraphs that establish the historical foundation of African American religious culture. This three-page paper will serve as the material for those highly crafted paragraphs.**

**The assessment rubric is expanded on the Stage 1 unit in the course shell.**

**Week 6** *March 2-8*

**Assignment:**

1. **Read W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, “The Forethought,” Chapters 1,2, 9, 10, and “The Afterthought.”**
2. **Quiz Or post to both discussion topics.**

**Week 7** *March 9-15*

**Assignment:**

1. **Read James Cone selections from *A Black Theology of Liberation*, pp 1-39.**
2. **Small Group Conference Presentations: The Three Most Important/Troubling ideas in James Cones’ *A Black Theology of Liberation.***

**Week 8 :**  *March 16-March 29 (spring break included) You may complete the work anytime during the two weeks*

**Assignment:Read either about The Womanist Tradition or Hip Hop and Religion. Articles are linked in the week’s assignment. Katie Cannon, “Womanist Perspectival Discourse and Canon Formation"  *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9, 1993: 29-37. Hip Hop selections are from a Special Issue of *Culture and Religion: Hip Hop and Religion* 10.1, March 2009.**

**Week 9:** March 30-April 5 (Easter Sunday )

**Assignment:**

1. **100 points. Three-page paper on “subjectivity” and African American religious culture in the 20th century. Due Friday, April 3.**
2. **50 points. Peer reviews due Monday, April 6.**

**Week 10** April 6*-12*

**Read Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience* (VAARE), Introduction, Chapter 1 on Voodoo, Chapter 2, Ashe!.**

**[There are more details in this intro and two chapters than you’ve ever encountered in a reading of this length. Compare notes in the chat room, or make flash cards, or make vocabulary lists.]**

1. **Quiz Or post to both discussion topics.**

**Week 11** *April 13-19*

1. **Read Pinn, Chapter 4, “What if God Were One of Us?” and Chapter 5 “How Do We Talk About Religion?”**
2. **Quiz Or post to both discussion topics.**

**Week 12 :**  *April 20 –April 26*

**Assignment:**

1. **Read Pinn, Chapter 3, The Great Mahdi has come!**
2. **Additional background reading available, especially useful to people who might consider writing their final research on Nation of Islam in the U.S. Read “Lecture notes on Islam” and Jane I. Smith, Chapter 4, “Islam in the African American Community” in Islam in America (Columbia University Press, 1999). Available as a pdf in the doc sharing readings for the class.**
3. **Quiz Or post to both discussion topics.**

**Week 13** *April 27-May 3*

**100 points. 10 page rough draft for final paper. Rubric available in course shell.**

**Unit 14** *May 4-May 10*

**100 points. Peer review of rough drafts workshop and phone or videoconference with Prof. Keller. Rubric available in course shell.**

**Unit 15** *May 11-May 15*

**Final paper. 100 points 13-15 page research paper that includes: historical context of slave trade, subjectivity in the 20th century, contemporary issue in African American religious culture (womanism/hip hop).**

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