

## HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION

AAS 343 – Fall 2009

Tuesday – Thursday • 3:30 p.m.—4:50 p.m. • Eggers Hall 018

*Professor Herbert G. Ruffin II*

Email: hgruffin@syr.edu

Office Hours: or by Appointment • 10 a.m.—11:30 a.m.

### Course Description:

This course will examine the complex and varied African American religious experiences. The course's goal is twofold: first, to introduce you to the history and culture of African American Religion; and second, to determine the manner in which this experience relates to the contemporary world. Specifically, this course emphasizes Black religious practices, institutions, and thought in African Americans quest for material, psychological, and spiritual freedom through a thorough examination of: African Religious Traditions; African Diaspora; Slave Religion; Black Church and Abolition Movement; Race, Class, and Gender; Black Catholicism; Black Muslims; Alternative Black Religious Practices; Crisis in the Black Church; Civil Rights and Black Power Movements; and Mega churches.

### Required Readings

- Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*
- Milton C. Sernett, *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*
- Albert Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*
- Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*
- Mark Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*

### Course Requirements:

#### *Readings*

The readings listed are some of the critical works in African American Religious History. Unless otherwise indicated, each book which appears on the weekly reading schedule should be read in its entirety.

#### *Attendance and Participation*

In order to do well in this class attendance is MANDATORY. If for any reason you need to miss class, call or email me in advance. If for any reason you must leave class early, let me know before class begins.

### Grading

Articulating YOUR VOICE, Reading and Writing on the presented content is important for receiving a good grade in this course. The teaching method that I use is akin to Jazz: a combination of teaching from foundational material such as your readings, and improvisation and analysis independent of the text. Ultimately, students are expected to get immersed in the assigned readings and come to class with notes and prepared to take notes, “think on their feet,” and articulate their voices when in-class discussion is elicited.

Each student will be expected to participate in two Student Interaction Groups (SIG). Each week a SIG will lead class discussion, based on weekly readings. They will be also responsible for design activities that

draw-out student interaction. This is 10% your grade. Attendance, Event Papers, and In-Class Participation account for an additional 50% of your grade.

The Event Papers are 10% of your grade. They consist of you visiting two different Black churches or religious experiences in Onondaga County on separate occasions, and writing two 3-4 pages papers on the experiences. In particular, I am looking for you relating the experiences to course readings and film. These papers can be turned in at anytime between week 2 to 13. I will not be accepting papers after week 14.

several general propositions or questions that serve as a taking off point for essays based on the required reading and lectures covering the appropriate topic. There may also be several short answer questions.

The Final Project accounts for 40% of the total credit for this course. This project will be the equivalent of a 12-15 page typed, stapled, numbered, sourced, and double-spaced history on Black Religion. (Graduate students are required to write an 21-25 page paper.) This includes researching either an independent subject, or conducting an oral history on Black religion in Greater Syracuse. Your project should include a one page introduction discussing the project's thesis, methods, and overview. Finally, your projects should place the work into a historical context. More details will be supplied later in the term.

### ***Attendance***

Three ABSENCES constitute a lost grade, i.e., your grade will drop from an "A" to a "B."

Four TARDIES equal an absence.

### ***Grade Breakdown***

Attendance and Participation/In-Class Discussion:	40 percent
Group Participation	10 percent
Event Papers (2)	10 percent
Final Project	40 percent

## **Course Schedule**

### ***Week I: Introduction***

- T: Film: This Far by Faith
- Th: Wilmore, Chp 1; and Sernett, Introduction

### ***Week II: African Religious Traditions and the Middle Passage***

- T: Wilmore, Chp 2
- Th: Raboteau, Prologue and Chp 1
- **Preliminary Project Abstracts Due**

### ***Week III: African Diaspora and Slave Rebellions***

- T: Sernett, Chp 1 (Selected Articles)
- Th: Wilmore, Chp 3

### ***Week IV: Slave Religion in the Antebellum South and Religious Practice***

- T: Sernett, Chp 2 (Selected Articles)
- Th: Raboteau, 7 and 8

### ***Week V: The African Church Movement and the Freedom Struggle in the North***

- T: Raboteau, 4; and Sernett, 139-154
- **Final Project Abstracts Due**
- Th: Library

**Week VI: *The African Church Movement and the Freedom Struggle in the North***

- T: Sernett, Chp 3
- Th: Field Trip

**Week VII: *The Promised Land***

- T: Raboteau, 2; and Sernett, 282-295
- Th: Sernett, Chp 4 (Selected Articles)

**Week VIII: *Black Catholics***

- T: Sernett, Freedom's Time of Trial, 296-300; and Raboteau, Chapter 6
- Th: Open Office (Go over your semester and final paper)

**Week XIV: *Gender and the Early-Black Women's Movement***

- T: Higginbotham, Chp 1 and 2
- Th: Higginbotham, Chp 5 and 6

**Week X: *The Deradicalization of the Black Church***

- T: Higginbotham, Chp 7
- Th: Wilmore, Chp 7

**Week XI: *The Dechristianization of the Black Church***

- T: Wilmore, Chp 8
- Th: Sernett, Chp 5 (Selected Articles)

**Week XII: *Christianity on Trial***

- T: Sernett, Chp 6 (Selected Articles)
- Th: Chapman, Intro and Chp 1

**Week XIII: *Black Religion during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements***

- T: Chapman, Chp 2
- Th: Raboteau, 3; and Wilmore, Chp 9
- **Event Papers are Due**

**Week XIV: *Liberation Theology, Race and Gender***

- T: Wilmore, Chp 9; and Chapman, Chp 4
- Th: Chapman, Chp 5

**Week XV: *Mega Churches and Presentations***

- T: (Articles to be assigned)
- Th: Presentations

**Week XVI: *Final Examination***

- Presentations
- **Final Projects Due**
- Closure—An End of the Semester Discussion about the Term's Selected Topics