

Pentecostalism and African American Religion

Graduate level course

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My purpose in designing this syllabus was quite simple: is there enough material to do a course solely dedicated to African American Pentecostalism? The answer is a resounding yes. What it requires, however, is the willingness of the professor to move across disciplines in such a way as to gather the corpus of materials together. Simply teaching a history or a theology course is not adequate to the task. As I see it, a variety of methodologies have to be employed in structuring the class, including, sociology, musicology, political science, gender, sexuality, religious studies, history and theology. The nature of African American studies broadly defined necessitates the course being conceived of broadly, but a religious and theological orientation remains at the heart of the course.

I would welcome any suggestions for additional material, but do know also that this course is not meant to cover “all” of Black Pentecostalism. Most students, even graduates, are confused and bemused by the vast variety of “Pentecostalisms” that abound, so I wanted to keep a clean line of history throughout the course. It also means that the material read at times will not be the norm. The information on many of these denominations is not found in a denominational history book, rather it is found in self published tracts, pamphlets, and convocation (annual meeting) books that continue to reprint histories. The material exists, but for many of these denominations archives do not exist. The archives are attics, beds and my duplex in LA.

Given that, my assignments for students would be healthy class discussion, a research paper, but also a Oral history assignment where they have to interview one person who is over 70 years of age and been involved in a black Pentecostal Church for a large portion of their lives (at least 25 years). The strategy behind the assignment is two fold, one, to teach students how to do an oral interview, and two, to compile as many stories as possible about the everyday lives and history of people within these congregations. Coupled with this assignment, the student will have to do some primary research, either newspapers or other resources, to find something related to African American Pentecostalism prior to the 1950’s and bring three examples to the class for discussion.

African American Religion and Pentecostalism

The “Pentecostal experience” has been ascribed to All African American churches because of the perception of ecstatic worship and preaching as being part and parcel of all African American Religious Experience. African American Pentecostal and Holiness Churches, however, have a tradition separate from just worship traditions that are vital, yet fraught with schisms, splits and social issues. The course will help in your understanding of the similarities and differences of the history of African American Pentecostalism, while touching on some of the broader historical issues of both African American and American Religion.

Book List:

Course Pack of Readings/ Reserve listings

Clemmons, Ithiel: *Bishop C. H. Mason and The Church of God in Christ* Pneuma Life Publishing

Jackson, Jerma A. *Singing in my Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age*

Jacobsen, Douglas: *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement*: Indiana University Press

James Goff, Grant Wacker. *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders*, University of Arkansas Press

Course Requirements:

Participation in weekly group discussions: 15%

Oral History Project: 25 %

This history project entails that you to interview one member of an African American congregation that is either Holiness or Pentecostal in its orientation. A set of Research questions will be provided for you in class. I would prefer that you videotape the interview, yet audiotape is also acceptable. A separate guideline sheet and release forms will be given to you by the third week of the semester. The minimum age of the person interviewed must be 70 years of age (!). This is so we get data on someone who has been through, hopefully, the 1950's forward, although some of you may find that the person has been a member of the church all of their lives.

Church visit 25%

You must visit at least one Pentecostal church during the course of the class, preferably earlier in order to attempt to fulfill the requirements of the Oral history project. A short reflection paper of 5-7 pages I conjunction with this visit is expected within a week after your scheduled worship experience. Guidelines for this visit and format for the reflection paper will also be provided the third week of class

Research paper 35%

Your final research paper is no less than 15 pages in length, with footnotes and bibliography and no greater than 25 pages in length. Ideally, you will follow through from your oral history project and church visit, choosing to write your research paper on some aspect of this particular black Pentecostal denomination. Guidelines for the research paper will also be provided the third week of the class.

Course Schedule:

Week I: Holiness Antecedents in Pentecostalism

(This segment of the class is to uncover the Holiness stream of African American Pentecostalism. I am choosing to highlight this over and against other interpretations because of the internal splits in several of the Black Baptist conventions and some AME churches regarding the teaching of Sanctification, and the importance of this for major African American Pentecostal developments.)

Readings:

David Daniels: "Theology and the Holiness Network in the Greater Mississippi Region" in *The Cultural Renewal of Slave Religion: Charles Price Jones and the Emergence of the Holiness Movement in Mississippi* (Diss) p. 142-199

Harvey, Paul: "God Stepped in My Soul" in *Redeeming the South*, p. 107-137

Butler, Anthea: Bible Band Women and Women's Work in *Women and Religion in the African Diaspora*, John Hopkins Press (2005)

Irvin, Dale in *Portraits of a Generation* Charles Price Jones, Image of Holiness p. 37-51

Morris, Elijah Camp, "Sanctification" in (handout)

Cobbins, Ortho Bean: *History of the Church of Christ (Holiness) U.S.A., 1895-1965*.

Week II: Pentecostal Beginnings

This week's readings will cover the biography of William J. Seymour and C.H. Mason, with a look at the Azusa Street Revival and the impact of African American Pentecostalism. Some attention will be given to the competing historiography regarding the importance of Azusa, as well as the relationship between Parham and Seymour. Finally, a study of the Apostolic Faith newspaper will shed some light on African American beginnings.

Robeck, Cecil M "William J. Seymour" non-published document

Creech, Joe. "Visions of Glory: The Place of the Azusa Street Revival in Pentecostal History." *Church History* 65 (September 1996): 405-424.

Mason, Mary: *History and Life Works of Bishop C.H. Mason*: 26-37

Daniels, David: C.H. Mason in *Portraits of a Generation* 255-270

Ithiel C. Clemons, *Bishop C.H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ* 41-71

MacRobert, Iain , *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*

Like As of Fire: Azusa Street Newspapers: selected documents

Week III: Theological Foundations

These two weeks are an overview on the major theological streams in African American Pentecostalism. I have found that for many, the difference between Holiness-Pentecostal, Pentecostal, Oneness and other streams of Black Pentecostal churches have been misunderstood at best. The first week will cover specific doctrines, the second week, individuals and theological formation.

Robeck, C.M. "William J. Seymour and the 'Bible Evidence.'" In *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism*, ed. Gary B. McGee, 72–95. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991.

William Seymour: Doctrines and disciplines: Selected readings

COGIC Official Manual & Articles of Faith of the Church of God in Christ (1911)

Morris Ellis Golder, *A Doctrinal Study of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World*

Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ Official Manual

Church of God, Pillar and Ground of Truth Official manual

Week IV: Theological Foundations II

Jacobsen Doug: R.C. Lawson: *Thinking In the Spirit* 260-285
G. T. Haywood in *Thinking In the Spirit* 194-232

Taylor , Clarence: Smallwood Williams in *Black Religious Intellectuals* p.48-78

Selected sermons, C.H. Mason in 1926 Yearbook, COGIC

Week V: Gender

This module will be to explore the relationships between women and men in African American Pentecostal churches. The issue of ordination will be addressed, but also some

attention given to the differences in how African American women who are Pentecostals differ from others (church mothers, roles for women in the church, ect.)

Trulear, Dean, Ida Robinson in *Portraits of a Generation*, 309-324

Butler, Anthea: "Calling" in *Making A Sanctified World: Women in the Church of God in Christ*, forthcoming

Cheryl Townsend Gilkes: *Together and in Harness": Women's Traditions in the Sanctified Church*

Jerma A Jackson: Rosetta Thorpe in *Singing in my soul: Black gospel music in a secular age: 27-49*

Johnson, Mother Mary Mangrum, *The life and Works of Mother Mary Mangum Johnson*, np, nd

James Tinney: *The Feminist Impulse in Black Pentecostalism Spirit*:

Week VI Prohibitions and Practices

This week explores both the ecstatic, contemplative, and social practices of African American Pentecostals, with a heavy use on "outsider's" impression of these practices. These practices encompass, worship, domestic activities, and social structures with churches.

G.T. Haywood, *The marriage and Divorce Question in the Church*

C.H. Mason, *Double Marriages in 1926 Yearbook*

COGIC: *Purity Class Handbook*

Baldwin, James: *Go Tell It on the mountain*

Clarence E., III Hardy: *James Baldwin's God: Sex, Hope, and Crisis in Black Holiness Culture*

Cheryl J. Sanders: *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience In African American Religion and Culture*. P. 49-70

Select WPA Narratives

Holiness Codes

Hortense Powdermaker: Stranger and Friend: The way of an Anthropologist 155-182

Week VII & VIII: Race Relations, Political and Social concerns.

The ensuing two weeks are designed to look at first at the trajectory of civic and social engagement of African American Pentecostals during the next two weeks. This is to combat the “otherworldly” moniker that is often laid at the feet of Pentecostal churches in relationship to their activities within the confines of their communities. The second, and perhaps the task that has been in the background all semester, will be to interrogate in more detail the implications of race and racism on African American Pentecostal thought, worship and life.

Theodore Kornwiebel

C.H. Mason and contentious objectors

“I Thank God for the Persecution” the Church of God in Christ Under Attack ,in

“Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to compel Black Loyalty during World War I

Frederick Harris: Something Within: 154-175

Walter Hollenweger: Pentecost between Black and White: Five case studies on Pentecost and politics

Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend: The Roles of Church and Community Mothers: Ambivalent American Sexism or Fragmented African Familyhood?

Butler, Anthea: A Civic and Holy Friendship: Mary Mc Leod Bethune, Arenia Mallory, and the National Council of Negro Women

Week XI Home and Foreign Missions& education

Pentecostals have been accused of not valuing educational pursuits historically, however, of African American Pentecostals; education played a unique role, both in home and foreign missions activities as well as within local churches. This module will lean primarily on COGIC resources, but some information is available from other black Pentecostal churches as well.

Cheryl Sanders: Saints in Exile: 106-122

Daniels, David: Live so you can use me anytime Lord, anywhere: Theological Education in the Church of God in Christ, 1970-1997, Asian journal of Pentecostal Studies Vol 3 #2 2000

Crisis, May 1938 “ Mississippi Mud” (Saints industrial and Literary School)

1926 Yearbook of the Church of God in Christ

International Outlook, COGIC (1960's)

Week X & XI Music, Preaching and performance

This particular week probably goes without any explanation whatsoever, since music preaching and performance seems to be what most African American Pentecostal Churches are known for. However, a look at the trajectory historically of music in the tradition can also illumine some of the social and cultural changes within the tradition as well.

Weisenfeld, Judith: This far by Faith: Willie Mae Ford

Teresa Reed : The Holy profane: Religion in Black popular music.

Jackson, Jerma A. Singing in my Soul: black Gospel Music in a Secular Age

Horace Boyer: How Sweet the Sound: The Golden Age of Gospel (Sanctified Music Section)

Goodbye Babylon, Ledbetter (cd set on reserve) Dust-to digital

Say Amen, Somebody (video)

Week XII Contemporary Issues

This week will wrap up the class, and provide a course packet of current readings regarding new developments in African American Pentecostalism, including: Ordination of women, Sexuality, Full Gospel movements, and the Mega-church phenomenon.

Marla Fredericks: Between Sundays: Black women and Everyday struggles of Faith

H Carlyle Church Jr. The Accommodation and Liberation of Women in The Church of God in Christ, **Journal of Religious Thought**. Washington: 1996. Vol. 52/53, Iss. 2/1; p. 77 (14 pages)

David Daniels: "Doing all the Good that we can" The Political Witness of African American Holiness and Pentecostal churches in the post civil rights era in *New day Begun: African American churches and civic culture in post-civil rights America*, ed. R. Drew Smith 164-182