**50:840:216:74—African-American Religion**  
**Fall 2022**  
**Mondays/Wednesdays 3:45-5:05PM, Armitage 219**

**Instructor:** Nicholas A. Johnson  
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**Office Hours:** By Appointment

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the variety of African-American religions that exist in the Americas. The historical contexts around the developments of African-American religions and the lived experiences of African Americans will be main themes of this course. We will interrogate the diversity within African-American religious thought and the convergences and divergences within this tradition. Topics covered include race, racialization, the role of politics, gender, and liberation. Major scholars and schools of African-American religious thought will be introduced and discussed.

### GENERAL EDUCATION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course meets the General Education requirements for Ethics and Values (EAV) in the following ways:

1. Requires students to acquire competency in African-American religion as an academic discourse, its history of scholarship, main topics, and relationship to other disciplines related to the African-American experience
2. Helps students to develop a critical approach to the underlying cultural and ethical presuppositions of discourses on religion in general and African-American religion in particular.
3. Evaluate sources to articulate and defend one’s own views on issues in African-American religion
4. Identify the complex interactions between religious belief and practice and the rich historical, social, political, cultural, economic, and intellectual contexts in which religious people inhabit and live their religion
5. Develop better written and oral skills as well as analytical and ethical reasoning skills

### REQUIRED TEXTS


All other required readings will be available on Canvas (CV)
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance/Participation (20%): Class attendance is mandatory and will be taken every class session. Excessive absences will result in a low grade and/or failure of the course. Tardiness will also adversely affect one’s grade. Attendance alone, however, will be insufficient. Participation in class is mandatory as it is evidence of one’s preparation for class. Be prepared to be called on at random during class discussions. Simply, do the readings!

Discussion Facilitation (25%): Students will rotate facilitating class discussions each week. A schedule will be set up the first week of classes. For their assigned week, students will provide a brief synopsis of their understanding of the week’s readings, highlight material in the readings of interest to them, and pose questions for the class to discuss.

Short Papers (15% each): Two short papers (3-4 pages, double-spaced) will be due on the dates listed in the course schedule that will focus on material up to the point when the papers are due. More information about prompts for the papers will also be in the course schedule. Late papers will not be accepted.

Final Paper (25%): A final paper (8-10 pages, double spaced) that is both research based and reflective addressing any topic covered in class is due at the end of the semester. This means that students must incorporate sources outside of class in crafting the paper. The paper must be both research-based and reflective; thus, balance between research and reflection is key. Late papers will not be accepted.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are expected to adhere to the policies regarding academic integrity as put forth by Rutgers University. In all your written work, you are expected to put your ideas in your own words. Whenever you do use the ideas or words of anyone else, whether a written source or a verbal one, great care should be taken to identify all quotations as such, to document the source of each quotation, and to document sources used but not quoted verbatim when appropriate. All written work should follow the Chicago Manual of Style and should be double-spaced with standard margins. Use formal citation style, including a reference page. For information on the academic honesty policy at Rutgers please see: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/.

DOCUMENTED DISABILITY STATEMENT

Any student with a documented disability that requires academic accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Services for Students at (848) 445-6800 or dsoffice@rci.rutgers.edu. An official accommodation letter from ODS is required in order to make appropriate arrangements for the course, and must be presented well in advance of any assignments. Please notify the instructor as quickly as possible if the material presented in class is not accessible (e.g., videos need captioning, handouts are not readable for proper alternative text conversion, etc.).
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Sept. 7
Course introduction, syllabus review, community building, etc.

Week 2: Sept. 12; Sept. 14
What is African-American Religion?
Milton C. Sernett, “Introduction,” AARH, pp. 1-10
Anthony Pinn, What is African American Religion (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), pp. 1-17

Week 3: Sept. 19; Sept. 21
Origins and Roots: Africans Arrive to the Americas
Olaudah Equiano, “Traditional Ibo Religion and Culture,” AARH, pp. 13-19

Week 4: Sept. 26; Sept. 28
Origins and Roots, Continued: Varieties of African Religions in Early America
Lemuel Haynes, “A Black Puritan’s Farewell,” AARH, pp. 52-60

Week 5: Oct. 3; Oct. 5
“Oh, Freedom Over Me;” African-American Religion and Resistance to Enslavement
Nat Turner, “Religion and Slave Insurrection, AARH, pp. 89-101
Frederick Douglass, “Slaveholding Religion and the Christianity of Christ, AARH, pp. 102-111
Jarena Lee, “A Female Preacher Among the African Methodists,” AARH, pp. 164-184
Week 6: Oct. 10; Oct. 12
Reconstructing Religion: African-American Religion During Reconstruction and Jim Crow

Isaac Lane, “From Slave to Preacher Among the Freedmen,” *AARH*, pp. 245-250

Amanda Berry Smith, “The Travail of a Female Colored Evangelist,” *AARH*, pp. 270-281


First Short Paper Due on Material Covering Weeks 1-6

Week 7: Oct. 17; Oct. 19
The Great Migration and Urban Religion


Lacy Kirk Williams, “Effects of Urbanization on Religious Life,” *AARH*, pp. 372-375

Rabbi Matthew, “Black Judaism in Harlem,” *AARH*, pp. 473-477


Week 8: Oct. 24; Oct. 26
African-American Religion and Civil Rights

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” *AARH*, pp. 519-535


Week 9: Oct. 31; Nov. 2
Black Power and Black Religion


James H. Cone, “Black Theology and the Black Church: Where Do We Go From Here?,” *AARH*, pp. 567-579
Week 10: Nov. 7; Nov. 9
Black Nationalism, Racial Secularism, and Religious Freedom

Marcus Garvey, “Garvey Tells His Own Story,” AARH, pp. 453-463


Week 11: Nov. 14; Nov. 16
“If It Wasn’t for the Women:” Religion, Black Women, and Womanism

Herbert Morrisohn Smith, “Elder Lucy Smith, AARH, pp. 487-498


Second Short Paper Due on Material Covering Weeks 7-13

Week 12: Nov. 21; Nov. 23
Re-engaging Religious Roots: African Diaspora Religions, Immigration, and Syncretism


Week 13: Nov. 28; Nov. 30
Culture, Capitalism, and Representations of Black Religion

Father Divine, “ The Realness of God, to you-wards…” AARH, pp. 478-486


Week 14: Dec. 5; Dec. 7
Black Religion and Hip Hop

Christina Zanfagna, “Roads to Zion: Hip Hop’s Search for the City Yet to Come,” Holy Hip Hop in the City of Angels (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 128-144
Week 15: Dec. 12; Dec. 14
Black Religion in the Age of Black Lives Matter


Course Review; Preparation for Final Papers

Final Paper Due: TBA