

RELI 345 – Black Atlantic Religion

Instructor: Alejandro Escalante

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Fall 2019 – Carroll 110

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:15am–12:45pm

Office hours: Mondays, 9am–10am, or by appointment



Figure 1 © Jean-Michael Basquiat, *Untitled*, 1982.

Course description

Today, the Caribbean exists a mixture of African, European, and indigenous cultures. Since the late fifteenth-century, this mixture has often been the result of violent encounters between enslaved Africans and indigenous people of the Antilles, and colonial Europeans. This class will pay specific attention to the ways that enslaved Africans and their descendants in the wider Atlantic regions of the Americas developed their own systems of religious cosmologies in the wake of enslavement. Some of the religious practices analyzed in the course will be Santería, Palo Monte, Candomblé, Vodou, and Espiritismo. The goal of this course is to provide students with a basic introduction to the various frameworks of religious thought in the Black Atlantic. Part of this means that by the end of the course, students will be able to 1) articulate the importance of theoretical concepts for understanding mixture and exchange, 2) demonstrate knowledge of the basic practices, epistemologies, and vocabulary of religious studies, and 3) develop postures of learning through immersion experiences in Black Atlantic traditions. This course fulfills Gen Ed. requirements in GL, and BN.

Required Textbooks (available at the Student Store)

- Edmonds, Ennis B. and Michelle Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0814722350

- Murrell, Nathaniel Samuel. *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to Their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-1439900413
- All other required readings will be made available on Sakai as PDFs
- Students will be reading approximately 50–60 pages of reading *per week*. Of those pages, approximately half will be “due” each class period. That is: by Tuesday, the readings listed for Tuesday should be read; by Thursday, the readings listed for Thursday should be read.

Grading and percentages

Participation and attendance (§1): 10%
 Reading responses (§2): 20%
 Midterm Essay (§3): 20%
 Final Essay (§3): 20%
 Final Exam (§4): 30%

Grade Scale

A 94-100
 A- 93-90
 B+ 87-89
 B 84-86
 B- 80-83
 C+ 77-79
 C 74-76
 C- 70-73
 D+ 67-69
 D 64-66

Requirements

• *Participation and attendance (§1)*: Students are required to attend all class meetings. Students will have two excused absences throughout the course of the semester. After these two excused absences, each subsequent absence will count as a zero for that day’s participation grade. Participation means more than simply showing up; it means contributing to the class discussion through questions or comments in order to further our class discussions. This means that student should bring readings to class, be prepared to discuss them, to cite them, and to engage with your classmates in a lively discussion.

Students can be excused from class attendance for authorized university activities or for religious observances required by the student’s faith. Primary holy days for religious observance are listed on a web-based interfaith calendar site at www.interfaithcalendar.org. Students are responsible for providing a written notice for an excused absence for a religious observance two weeks in-advance of the date requested or as soon as possible if the date occurs within the first two weeks of the semester. Students who will be absent for authorized university activities must also provide us with appropriate written notice prior to the absence.

• *Weekly reading responses (§2)*: Due on Sunday 11:59pm each week, the student will submit a 300–400-word response to the week’s readings via Sakai. Each reading response will consist of a summary of the week’s readings *and* a critical analysis of the arguments contained in each reading. Analysis could include critique of the internal logic of the reading’s argument, critique by outside authors (either that week’s or another week’s), or critique by outside reading from other courses, film, or other media. Please note: critique does not mean being negative; critique means taking the arguments seriously *and* generously, trying to understand what the author is trying to say, to whom they are trying to say these things to, and what they might have left out,

not considered or completely missed in their analysis. Responses consisting of a summary *or* analysis will receive partial credit (√); responses neither a summary nor analysis will receive no credit (√-); and responses consisting of both will receive full credit (√+).

• *Papers (§3)*: Week 8, midterm essays will be due. Midterm essays invite the student to write on the connections between pop culture and Black Atlantic religion. Students should seek to be creative in how they understand both popular culture and religion by looking not simply at movies, but also music, music videos, video games, and books. During Week 6, students will receive a list of examples of places to look for religion in pop culture and more specific details on how essays should be structured. Week 15, final essays will be due. This essay will ask you to put two Black Atlantic religious traditions in conversation and compare and contrast them around a single issue that they have both discussed. Week 12, students will receive more specific instruction on how these essays should be structured with examples on how to structure them.

All papers should be: 1) in Times New Roman, Helvetica, or Calibri fonts, 2) 12-point, and double spaced, and 3) in-text, Chicago-style citation. Example:

In-text

“Religion is one of the most important elements of Caribbean culture that links Afro-Caribbean people to their African past” (Murrell 2010, 1).

NB: The period comes after the citation, there is no punctuation inside of the quotation, and the citation is outside of the quotation marks.

Bibliography

Murrell, Nathaniel Samuel. *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010.

NB: The bibliography entry has a ½ inch hanging indent; the title of the book is italicized; and is listed alphabetically by the author’s last name in the bibliography.

• For citation questions, please visit:

http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html

• For help with writing, please visit: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/> and <https://learningcenter.unc.edu/>

Exams (§4)

- There is no mid-term exam for this class.
- Final exam: December 7, 2020, 8AM-11AM, FedEx 3011

Honor Code

• Like all classes at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, this course requires strict adherence to the University’s Honor Code. I urge all students to become familiar with its terms at <http://instrument.unc.edu>. If you ever have questions about the application of the Honor Code, please contact me right away. The Instrument of Student Judicial Governance defines plagiarism as: *the form of deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded*

or otherwise. If you have questions about properly citing sources, please take the UNC based tutorial on the subject, found at <http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruct/plagiarism>. All materials you need to cite for the class are provided as course readings, so in-line citation or any standard footnote style is acceptable.

Disability Accommodations

- Students with disabilities, whether physical or mental, visible or not, are encouraged to speak with the instructor at any time to request accommodations. Moreover, students are also encouraged to register with Accessibility Resources and Services at the university-level to make specific arrangements for exams. For more information, please visit: <https://ars.unc.edu/>

Electronics

- Students are encouraged to use whatever note taking practice they are comfortable with in this class. This means that you may use computers, tablets, or hand-written notes. However, unless accommodations are required, cellphones are not permitted during class time; all phones should be muted before the start of class and put away (unless a student is expecting an important phone call/text; in which case, please let me know with as much notice as possible).

Class schedule

All reading modifications will be given with as much notice as possible

Week 1 – Introducing the Black Atlantic

Tuesday

- Introduction to class, each other, instructor, and syllabus overview.
- Introductory lecture on history of slavery in the Americas.

Thursday (read Sharpe *and* choose either Hall or Walcott)

- Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, ch. 1 “The Wake,” pp. 1–22. *and*
- Dougal G. Hall, “People in Slavery,” pp. 13–30 *or*
- Derek Walcott, “The Muse of History,” pp. 36–64

Week 2 – Shaping Black Atlantic World

Tuesday

- James A. Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*, ch. 2 “The Age of Discovery and the Emergence of the Atlantic World,” pp. 15–36

• Thursday

Stephan Palmié, *The Cooking of History*, intro. “BL2532.S3, or How Not to Study “Afro”-“Cuban” “Religion,”” pp. 1–30.

Week 3 – Forming Black Atlantic Religions

Tuesday

- James A. Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*, ch. 1 “Studying Black Religion: Contacts/Exchanges and Continuities/Discontinuities,” pp. 1–14

Thursday

- Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, ch. 1 “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity,” pp. 1–40

Week 4 – Overview of Black Atlantic Religions

Tuesday

- Paul Christopher Johnson, *Diaspora Conversions*, ch. 1 “What is Diasporic Religion?” pp. 30–59.

Thursday

- Ennis B. Edmonds and Michelle Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History*, ch. 5 “Creole African Traditions,” pp. 93–120

Week 5 – Haitian Vodou

Tuesday

- Margarite Fernández Olmos et al., *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, ch. 4 “Haitian Vodou,” pp.

Thursday

- Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, ch. 3 “Vodou and the Haitians’ Struggle,” pp. 57–73

Week 6 – Vodou, Voodoo, Hoodoo

Tuesday

- Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, ch. 4 “Serving the Lwa,” pp. 74–91

Thursday (both)

- Lænnec Hurbon, “American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou,” pp. 181-197 *and*
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, pp. 179–198

Week 7 – Cuban Reglas

Tuesday

- Margarite Fernández Olmos et al., *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, ch. 2 “The Orisha Tradition in Cuba,” pp.

Week 7 – Cuban Reglas (continued)

Thursday

- Joseph Murphy, *Santería*, ch. 2 “Cuba,” pp. 21–36

Week 8 – Regla de Ocha and Regla Conga in Cuba

Tuesday (both)

- Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, ch. 5 “Caribbean Santería,” p. 95–113
and
- Joseph Murphy, *Santería*, ch. 12, “The Religion,” pp. 121–143.

Thursday (both)

- Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, ch. 7 “Palo Monte Mayombe,” pp. 135–159
and
- Todd Ramón Ochoa, *Society of the Dead*, ch. 7 “Palo Society,” pp. 71–81

Week 9 – Puerto Rico’s Espiritismo

Tuesday

- Margarite Fernández Olmos et al., *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, ch. 7 “Espiritismo,” pp.

Thursday

- Raquel Romberg, *Witchcraft and Welfare*, intro. “Ritual Alchemy,” pp. 1–26

Week 10 – Healing and Witchcraft in Puerto Rico

Tuesday

- Raquel Romberg, *Healing Dramas*, intro. “Healing Dramas,” pp. 1–13

Thursday

- Reinaldo L. Roman, *Governing Spirits*, ch. 4 “Self-Governing Spirits,” pp. 107–129

Week 11 – Brazil’s Candomblé

Tuesday

- Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, ch. 8 “Dancing to Orixas’ Axe in Candomblé,” pp. 159–182

Thursday

- J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, ch. 4 “Candomblé’s Newest Nation: Brazil,” pp. 149–187

Week 12 – Umbanda in Brazil

Tuesday

- Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, ch. 9 “Umbanda and Its Antecedents,” pp. 183–201

- Kelly E. Hayes, *Holy Harlots*, ch. 1 “Wicked Women and Femme Fatales,” pp. 3–37

Week 13 – Blackening Religion, Theorizing Blackness, pt. 1

Tuesday

- Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, *The Creolization of Theory*, intro. “The Creolization of Theory,” pp. 1–33

Thursday

- Stuart Hall, “Thinking the Caribbean: Creolizing Thinking,” pp. 61–94

Week 14 – Blackening Religion, Theorizing Blackness, pt. 2

Tuesday

- Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman,’” pp. 355–372

Thursday

- Stuart Hall, “Colonial Landscapes, Colonial Subjects,” pp. 3–24

Week 15 – Blackening Religion, Theorizing Blackness, pt. 3

Tuesday

- Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, ch. 2 “Redressing the Pained Body,” pp. 49–78

Thursday

- Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, ch. 2 “The Unknown, The Uncertain,” pp. 13–52