

***Religion and Culture in Post-Civil Rights Black America  
Young Scholars in American Religion (Fall 2014)***

**INSTITUTIONAL SETTING:**

Columbia University is a highly selective, private university located in New York City, with a total enrollment of close to 30,000 students across all of its schools. Roughly 8,000 of these students are enrolled in one of the undergraduate schools (Columbia College, Engineering, and General Studies); but classes are comprised of students from Barnard College, Jewish Theological Seminary and, a bit less frequently, Union Theological Seminary as well. As a rule students are both well prepared and motivated to keep up with what is expected of them in the classroom. Moreover, although many of them are quite involved in extracurricular activities on and off-campus, for the most part they have the resources to devote the majority of their time to their studies.

**CURRICULAR CONTEXT:**

My appointment at Columbia University is split evenly between the Religion Department and the Institute for Religion in African-American Studies (IRAAS). As a rule I teach one course for each unit per semester. Thus far, for both Religion and African-American Studies, my classes have been primarily geared towards undergraduates. These courses have included seminars and lectures, and they span a range of topics specific to each unit (i.e. Theory and Method in Religious Studies, Introduction African-American Studies); as well as those that bring the two together (i.e. Religion in Black America) and could be taught in either Religion or IRAAS. The syllabus I've included in here falls into the latter category, and will be offered next Spring (2015) in IRAAS.

*Religion and Culture in Post-Civil Rights Black America* is a seminar (estimated 12-15 students) that falls within the curriculum of IRAAS' Free-standing Master's Degree program. This program tends to attract a number of students who are interested in going on to pursue a PhD. The MA program has been very successful in student placement, so students are often highly motivated. At the same time IRAAS' MA program is small; so I anticipate that the course will attract a number of upper-level undergraduates, as well as, perhaps, one or two PhD students.

**TEACHING METHODOLOGY:**

In general, this course will function as a graduate seminar, highly dependent upon student preparation and contributions to class discussions. I intend to offer brief introductory remarks at the start of each class, which will be complemented by a presentation by one or two students on the reading that has been assigned for the week. If previous experience proves predictive, then most students will come with little, in any, prior background in the academic study of religion. Previously I attempted to address this by assigning several readings that theorize "black religion" during the first two weeks of the course. This go round, however, I have placed readings up front that I hope will help to frame the semester's conversation through a broader engagement with religion and American culture during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first section of the course is driven by theoretical concerns that will provide the seminar with a shared language and conceptual frame intended to organize the close engagement with recent scholarship that organizes the second section. In this regard, the series of monographs assigned in Section Two serve as case studies for exploring how African American religion and culture might be seen

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anew when cast as part and parcel of the larger American story; during a historical moment that witnessed the entangled (re) ascendancy of Evangelical Christianity, the (alleged) achievement of racial equality under the law, and the onset of late Capitalism.

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**Monday 11:00-12:50pm; Location TBA**

Professor Josef Sorett  
80 Claremont Ave, Room 307  
Phone: (212) 851-4141  
Email: js3119@columbia.edu

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This is an advanced-level seminar on African American religion and culture open to graduate students, and advanced undergraduates with prior background in the subject. More specifically, this course centers its queries around developments during the period commonly referred to as the "post-Civil Rights era," (but which has also often been framed through the related rhetorics of "postmodern," "postcolonial" and "post-Soul"). To this end, readings and discussions will explore black culture—both within formal religious traditions, but also more broadly as they are revealed in the arts, politics and popular culture—during the latter half of the twentieth century. Additionally, specific attention will be paid to major themes, challenges, questions and quandaries that have shaped the inter-disciplinary study of African American religion in recent years.

**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:**

- Class Participation (20%): Students are expected to arrive each week having completed assigned readings and prepared to make informed contributions to class discussions.
- Weekly Response Papers (10%): Over the course of the semester students are expected to write ten critical responses (< 1 single-spaced pages) to weekly readings. Responses are to be posted to the Dropbox on Courseworks each *Sunday by 8pm*. Students are not expected to summarize readings, but to raise and address 1-2 critical questions related to the readings.
- Class Presentation/Book Review (20%): During the first week of class each student will sign-up to lead an introduction (approximately 10 minutes) to one of the class sessions, in which they will lay out main points for contention and question from the assigned reading. This presentation will be turned in, in the form of a book review (5-6 double-spaced pages), at the end of class on the day it is presented.
- Final "Mapping the New Black" Essay (50%): Students will write a final essay (12-15 double-spaced pages) that explores the patterns of thought and assumptions that emerged over the course of the semester's reading. Engaging at least six of the nine texts assigned in Section Two of the course, students should stake a claim concerning the significance of religion to African American life in the post-Civil Rights period.

**Statement on Academic Integrity:**

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Students are expected to do their own work, and to use appropriate citations when drawing on the ideas of others. Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated. For Columbia's full statement on academic integrity, go to: <http://www.college.columbia.edu/facultyadmin/academicintegrity>

**COURSE READINGS:**

Reading for this course is approximately 250 pages per week. Students are encouraged to purchase all assigned books, but at least one copy of each work will on reserve at the library.

**Required Texts:**

Marla Frederick. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*.  
 Nelson George. *Post-Soul Nation: The Explosive, Contradictory, Triumphant, and Tragic 1980s as Experienced by African Americans*.  
 Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction*.  
 Tracey Hucks. *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism*.  
 John L. Jackson. *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*.  
 Kathryn Lofton. *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*.  
 Omar McRoberts. *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*.  
 Deborah Smith Pollard. *When the Church Becomes Your Party: Contemporary Gospel Music*.  
 Daniel T. Rogers. *Age of Fracture*.  
 Carolyn Rouse. *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam*.  
 Franklin Sirmans, Ed. *Neohoodoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith*.  
 Jonathan L. Walton. *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*.  
 Robert Wuthnow. *The Restructuring of American Religion*:

**COURSE SCHEDULE:**

Week 1 Course Overview/Introductions

**Section I Religion and Culture in America Since the 1960s**

Week 2 African American Religion & Culture  
 Glaude. *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction*.  
 Nelson George. *Post-Soul Nation*.

Week 3 American Religion Since the 1960s  
 Wuthnow. *The Restructuring of American Religion*.

Week 4 American Culture Since the 1960s  
 Rogers. *Age of Fracture*.  
 Bethany Moreton. "The Soul of Neoliberalism."

Week 5 Post-Civil Rights/Post-Colonial  
 Richard Iton. *In Search of the Black Fantastic*. (Chs. 1,7-8)  
 K. Anthony Appiah. "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?"

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Week 6      Post-Modern/Post-Soul  
                Greg Tate. "Cult-Nats Meet the Freaky-Deke"  
                Trey Ellis. "The New Black Aesthetic"  
                Stuart Hall. "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?"  
                bell hooks. "Postmodern Blackness"

***Section II      Religion and Culture in the Post—Civil Rights/Colonial/Modern/Soul—Era***

Week 7      Marla Frederick. *Between Sundays*.

Week 8      Jonathan Walton. *Watch This!*

Week 9      Kathryn Lofton. *Oprah*.

Week 10     Carolyn Rouse. *Engaged Surrender*.

Week 11     John Jackson. *Real Black*.

Week 12     Tracey Hucks. *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism*.

Week 13     Deborah Smith Pollard. *When the Church Becomes Your Party*.

Week 14     Omar McRoberts. *Streets of Glory*.

Week 15     Franklin Sirmans, Ed. *Neohoodoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith*.