

Race and Religion  
REL 483—Fall 2018  
TR 3:30-5:50, Manly 210

Dr. K. Merinda Simmons  
Email: merinda.simmons@ua.edu

Office: Manly 300 (348-9911)  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 11-12 and by appointment

REL main office: Manly 212 (348-5271)

**Course Overview/Description:**

In this seminar, students will use critical theory to explore “race” and “religion” as tools people use to organize their social worlds. Emphasizing scholarship and texts within African American Studies and the academic study of religions, this course encourages students to think about the structural dynamics at work in popular notions of experience, history, and identity.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Upon completion of this course, students in REL 483 will be able to:

- 1) Identify broad critical trends and debates within African American Studies and Religious Studies
- 2) Contextualize the analytical relationship between “experience,” “race,” and “history”
- 3) Develop professional and analytical writing skills in relation to research, grammar, style, and clarity
- 4) Demonstrate awareness and critical reflexivity about the scholar’s own role in academic inquiry
- 5) Lead class discussion through an organized presentation of course material

**Web Resources:**

[UA Box](#): All course readings beyond the required books will be in a shared Box folder.

**UA Severe Weather Protocol:**

UA’s primary communication tool for sending out information is through its web site at [www.ua.edu](http://www.ua.edu). In the event of an emergency, students should consult this site for further directions. In the event of an emergency, I will provide additional course information via email. If you have not done so already, please set up your weather advisory through Connect-ED--faculty, staff and students ([sign up on myBama](#)). Alternatively, you can listen to weather advisory broadcasts over WVUA 90.7 FM, Alabama Public Radio 91.5 FM or [use WVUA 7 Storm](#) Watch, which provides a free service you can subscribe to that allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail, pager or cell phone.

**Statement on Academic Misconduct:**

Academic misconduct is a serious offense and is taken very seriously at UA and in the class. Suspected cases of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. You are bound by UA’s [Honor Code](#) in this class.

**Requirements and Course Policies:**

- **Attendance and Participation:** Each student is expected to attend every class meeting, to be on time, to have read completely and with care all assignments, and to engage actively and intelligently in our discussions. *After two absences*, the student’s final grade will be reduced by one half letter for each additional absence. In other words, if your grade average was A at the end of the semester but you had four absences, your final grade for the course would be B+. If the absences are beyond your control due to health or family reasons, let me know as soon as possible. You remain responsible for anything that you miss in class, including

announcements. Your positive participation in the class is also vital. I expect everyone to do the readings and to speak up during classes. Be prepared to ask questions about the readings and class material and/or contribute your own ideas.

**\*\*note on reading:** You are expected to complete all of the readings for each day and be prepared to discuss them. Don't worry if something doesn't make sense or has you confused—bring your questions and issues to the class for discussion! But make sure always to work your way through the reading assignments.

- **Leading class discussion:** Each student is expected lead class discussion **twice** during the semester. Leading discussion involves opening the class with brief comments that introduce the text(s) and its author(s); drawing out key themes, contributions, and concerns; and linking the reading to the wider issues of the course. Introductions should be concluded by offering a set of questions (2-4) to be taken up in discussion.

*\*note: the number of presentations is subject to change at my discretion based on ultimate enrollment in the class.*

- **Response Papers** of no more than one page (though it should be a full page) that engage the week's readings and link them to the larger themes of the course will be due **ten times** throughout the semester. Responses should reflect a thorough reading of the assignments and thoughtful consideration of ideas, problems, and/or issues they raise in the context of the course as a whole and our discussions. These will receive one of the following grades: 1 (insufficient evidence of understanding and analysis), 15 (adequate understanding and analysis), or 30 (exemplary understanding and analysis). Over the course of the term, I will give you an opportunity to make up one of these paper grades.

*\*note: A Gendered Guide to the Galaxy is a great resource to help provide some data for your discussion(s), should you choose to make use of it (you are not required to do so).*

- **Take-home Midterm:** The midterm exam in this course will be a take-home set of short essay questions out of which students will answer 2 of 3. Each essay will be worth 100 points (so 200 points in total).
- **4-5 Page Essay** on questions provided a week in advance...You will have a choice as to which question you choose to answer. Guidelines will be provided on the question sheet and discussed in greater detail in class. Barring extenuating circumstances, **late papers will not be accepted** after the due date.

### Grading:

The course includes a total of 1000 points possible, distributed as follows:

Participation/Leading Discussion	100 points
Response Papers	300 points
Midterm	200 points
Essay	400 points

Final grades will be based on the following ranges: 970-1000 = A+; 920-969 = A; 900-919 = A-; 870-899 = B+; 820-869 = B; 800-819 = B-; 770-799 = C+; 720-769 = C; 700-719 = C-; 600-699 = D; 0-599 = F

All academic work must be the product of the scholar submitting it. Cheating will not be tolerated. Plagiarizing the work of someone else (quoting or summarizing another person's ideas or intellectual labor without giving them credit through proper quotations, citations, and acknowledgment) is a serious offence. If I discover that a scholar has copied the work of another author (whether a peer, classmate, or published author), the case will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

**Classroom Environment:**

In this small group setting, students are responsible for contributing to both their own learning experiences and the learning experiences of others. Because the contribution of ideas from each student is critical to the learning process, any behavior that creates an uncomfortable learning environment will not be tolerated. This includes interrupting others while they are talking, carrying on conversations separate from the class discussion, or making comments that could be perceived as offensive in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, disability, etc. Please make every effort to maintain an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing and responding to ideas.

**Consultations/Safe Zone:**

All students are encouraged to come by during my office hours, set up an appointment, and/or contact me by phone or email for assistance or with any questions. Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate routine absences. Although I cannot guarantee that accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance my ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you. Keep in mind that I have set aside my office hour specifically for meeting with students, so feel free to show up during that time or make an appointment via email for a different time slot. Also, please note that I am a Safe Zone Ally, one of many resource people on campus who provide an open door for individuals seeking information or assistance regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, harassment, and/or discrimination. Feel free to talk to me any time if you or someone you know has questions or concerns.

*\* The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility.*

*The UAct website ([www.ua.edu/uact](http://www.ua.edu/uact)) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.*

**Disability Accommodation:**

If you are registered with [the Office of Disability Services](#), please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call 348-4285 or visit Houser Hall, Suite 1000, to register for services.

**Calendar:**

**\*Subject to adjustment as necessary**

Aug. 23: Introduction

Aug. 30: Malory Nye on race and racialization; Religious Studies Project podcast interview with Rudy Busto

Sept. 6: Documentary *13th*

Sept. 13: Noliwe Rooks, "The Beginnings of Black Studies"; Anne McClintock, Intro to *Imperial Leather*

Sept. 20: Craig Prentiss, "Introduction" from *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity* (1-13); McCutcheon, "Africa on Our Minds"

Sept. 27: Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, Foreword and 1-58

Oct. 4: Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, 59-84

Oct. 11: Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*

Oct. 18: Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, contd.

Oct. 25: Mid-Semester Break

Nov. 1: Documentary, *Not Your Negro*

Nov. 8: Jon Sensbach, "Early Southern Religions in a Global Age"

Nov. 15: Case Study: the scholarly quest for Zora Neale Hurston

Nov. 22: Excerpt from Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*

Nov. 29: James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures" and "White Ethnicity" from *Routes*

Dec. 6: Excerpt from Colin Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons*

***\*final papers due Dec. 7 by 5pm***