



**REL 226.001**  
**AFRICAN DIASPORA RELIGIONS**

FALL 2021

Instructor: Richard Newton, PhD

(v. 8/24/21)

**Class Meetings:** Tuesday/Thursday 12:30-1:45pm Presidents Hall 207

**Office Hours:** Tuesday and Thursday 10:00-11:00am by online appointment (please email to schedule)

**Office Location:** MA 204

**Phone Number:** 205-348-9994

**Email:** [rwnewton@ua.edu](mailto:rwnewton@ua.edu)

**Prerequisites:** n/a

**Course Description and Credit Hours:**

Examines African influence throughout the Americas (e.g., Candomblé in Brazil, Vodou in the Caribbean, African American religions in North America), focusing on the interplay between religion, culture & politics. **HU-- 3 Credit Hours**

What if the study of religion started with the experiences drawn from the African Diaspora? Instead of privileging a specific tradition, this course examines the histories of people who came to a new world compelled to quickly learn the significance of “religion” itself. We will follow along by learning about the evolution of African Tradition Religions in the diaspora, plumbing the depths of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, listening to songs born of the hush harbors, visiting the black gods of American metropolises, and witnessing the diversity of black church culture. By charting these developments, we will better understand religion’s role in the human condition.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this course, successful students will be able to do the following:

1. *Define keywords in the academic study of religion (e.g. myth, truth-claims, texts, violence).*
2. *Recount historical moments emblematic of the politics of the African diaspora from antiquity to today.*
3. *Articulate scholarly arguments in African diasporic studies using a variety of primary sources.*
4. *Reframe constructions of the African diaspora with insights from the history of religion (both keywords and examples).*

### **Required Course Materials**

BIBLIOGRAPHY (available at the SupeStore)

Paul O. Myhre, ed. *Introduction to Religious Studies* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2009).

This book is a guide to the academic study of religion. It covers a wide range of approaches to the field while introducing you to key analytical terms. We'll use it to gain tools with which to theorize about the African diaspora. And we will also use it as a touch point for problematizing notions of religion in light of African diasporic history.

Michael A. Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora*, Second Edition (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

We will use this book as a survey text of the African diaspora. It provides an impressive global and historical picture of the African diaspora while also introducing key questions in the study of it. It is imperative that you purchase the second edition of this volume as it contains considerable updates central to our course.

\*Other materials throughout the semester will be distributed via Blackboard.

### **Course Meetings**

As infections from the novel coronavirus continue to produce public health hardships in the state, nation, and world, the success of our course will require us to stay attentive to the COVID-19 situation as it develops. The University of Alabama has initiated various measures (listed and updated at [healthinfo.ua.edu](http://healthinfo.ua.edu)) to help our community stay safe and learning actively. As always the course instructor will also implement measures to utilize classroom time and space so as to maximize learning for all participants. Please stay informed via your own inquisitiveness and the link listed above, and stay in contact with the instructor as you take care of yourself so that we can all remain as responsive and nimble as possible in these difficult times.

## **Class Resources**

### Blackboard

This in-person course is enhanced by a number of online platforms to enhance learning. Blackboard will be where you manage and share course files. You will need to activate notifications so that you regularly get course announcements and other vital information that will keep you current and connected. And should we need to meet for office hours or otherwise in a digital manner, we will use Blackboard as well. Blackboard is integrated with your UA email account.

All students are therefore required to have sufficient technological resources and competencies to participate fully in each weekly class. If you have a problem or foresee a hardship in this regard, please contact me as soon as possible so we can develop contingencies together.

## **COURSE FLOW**

This course is generally divided into three-session units. In every unit, you can expect to do the following:

(Session 1-Religious Studies)

1. **Review** the course announcement on Blackboard with notes and objectives about the reading for the coming session.
2. **Read** the assigned chapter from Myhre, taking notes on issues, questions, and ideas that seem central to the reading. Use [3] below to help you read effectively and efficiently.
3. **Work** through the interactive notebook activity that corresponds with Myhre to help you read, understand, and prepare for class (*highly recommended but not required*).
4. **Participate** in class as we actively work through the material in [1], [2], and [3], drawing upon case study analysis to help us synthesize information. Amend your study notes in class accordingly.

(Session 2-African Diaspora)

5. **Review** the course announcement on Blackboard with notes and objects about the reading for the coming session.
6. **Read** the assigned material from Gomez, taking notes on issues, questions, and events that appear central to the reading.
7. **Work** through the study notes to focus your reading on key terms, concepts, and events to prepare for class (*highly recommended but not required*).
8. **Participate** in class as we actively work through the material in [5], [6], and [7]. These sessions will help to focus on the details and themes central to our course goals.

(Session 3-Lab)

9. **Review** the course announcement on Blackboard with notes and objects about the coming session.
10. **Finish** any readings and notes from Sessions 1 and 2, review them, bringing any questions or insights to class.
11. **Submit** your study notes from the unit sessions on Blackboard by the beginning of class.
12. **In-class Quizzes** will be given to help you see where you are on course content. If you submit your notes (both [3] and [7]) by the beginning of class, you will get an automatic 100 regardless of your quiz score.
13. **Participate** in class by analyzing a select primary source using insights from Session 1 and Session 2. Take notes as these will be useful for exams.

QUIZZES:

During session 3, you will be given a quiz over the unit--usually a five-question quiz that involves anywhere from multiple choice, matching, fill in the blank, or short answer. This formative assessment is to help you see how you are doing in your course preparation and review. I will always give you insights on what to expect and we will go over the quiz in class afterwards.

For sessions 1 and 2, I will provide you with notes to help you make sure that you are keeping up with your preparation and review of course content. While your good-faith completion of these notes are not required, they will help you tremendously on the quizzes (and exams). Thus their completion is highly recommended. Should you complete and submit your notes prior to the quiz, you will receive a 100 for the unit's quiz, regardless of your score on the quiz.

\*To reward your hard work, your final grade will only include your top six unit scores.

EXAMS:

This course has two exams. The first part is a closed book/note exam over content from Myhre. The second part is an open-note/book exam that challenge you to theorize and historicize the African diaspora. The exams are not cumulative and will be taken on Blackboard.

\*To reward improvement, I will give an optional Exam 3. Should you improve, it will replace the score for Exam 1 or 2 (whichever is lower). This is completely optional and cannot hurt your grade. It will be due with your final project submission.

## MOVIE REVIEW BLOG POST

You will watch a film from the African Diaspora and write a 750-word blog post to teach a public audience about the relevance of a keyword learned in class. Your blog post must include [a] at least one quotation from each of our textbooks, [b] an embedded video clip that you unpack in the course of your post. Your citation can be in any style you choose so long as you include a bibliographic reference at the end and page references within the text. Your film must come from an approved list or be pitched to the instructor by November 16.

\*You will have the chance to submit a revised version of the blog post with your final project submission should you attempt to complete a draft by the due date.

## FINAL PROJECT

Drawing on everything we have covered this semester, what do you think is the major theme, trope, pattern, conflict, or argument in the history of religion in the African Diaspora? To put it another way, how would you sum up the big story of the African Diaspora? Give three specific examples or case studies that support your claim, drawing on the secondary and primary sources we read this semester. Conclude your essay by explaining what your claim means for the future of the study of religion--for you and the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Alabama. You can complete this in one of two ways.

**Option 1:** An Essay. You do not need to do any research or use any sources beyond what we read this semester. Feel free to use chapters or sources we did not read in the textbooks if you find them helpful. The essay should be around 1500-2000 words (5-7 pages) in length, double-spaced, in 12pt readable font. You may use whatever reference style with which you are comfortable as long as you are consistent and I can tell which of our course materials you are citing through references and bibliography/works cited.

**Option 2:** An Unessay (must meet with me by November 12). This is your opportunity to break open the corral of the traditional essay. Be creative. Find alternative ways to answer the prompt. Consider your strengths, talents, and skills and think about how to apply them. In other courses

students have turned in ceramics projects, paintings, 3-D and 2-D collages, museum exhibits, theatrical plays, documentaries, music performances, and business plans, and sample class lessons. There are numerous other ways to approach the assignment as well. Don't feel constrained by this list of possible unessays. Play to your strengths. If the concept of the unessay intrigues you, it is required that you meet with me in advance to talk through your idea. This way we can make sure that you meet the assignment requirements.

## GRADES

### *Assignment Breakdown*

<b>Assignment Type</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Quizzes/Unit Scores (Top six unit scores counted)	20%
Exams I and II (Optional Exam 3 replaces the lower of the two exams)	40%
Movie Blog Post (Revision of the original submission counts for full credit consideration for this assignment)	15%
Final Project	25%

*Grading Scale* --\*(Final Average is Rounded up at .5)

59 > =F	Unacceptable Performance
60-63 =D-	Insufficient Performance
64-66 =D	Needs Improvement
67-69 =D+	Adequate Performance
70-73 =C-	Acceptable Performance
74-76 =C	Satisfactory Performance
77-79 =C+	Promising Performance
80-83 =B-	Good Performance
84-86 =B	Commendable Performance
87-89 =B+	Great Performance
90-93 =A-	Advanced Performance

94-96 =A    Excellent Performance

97-100=A+    Superior Performance

**COURSE DUE DATES:**

Below you'll find a course calendar with due dates for each assignment. **Please keep up with Blackboard for updates on scheduling, meetings, etc.**

<b>Unit Focus</b>	<b>Class Sessions</b>
<b>Unit 1</b>  <i>Course Orientation</i>	<b>Classes start on 8/19.</b> Syllabus Access Blackboard  <b>Tuesday 8/24</b> “What is Religion?” (Myhre) *August 25 is the last full day to drop a course without a grade of a “W.”  <b>Thursday 8/26</b> “How is Religion Studied?” (Myhre)
<b>Unit 2</b>  <i>Myths and Origin Stories</i>	<b>Tuesday 8/31</b> “Origin Stories and Religion: How are Religions Formed?” (Myhre)  <b>Thursday 9/2</b> “Introduction” and “Antiquity” (Gomez)  <b>Tuesday 9/7</b> Lab-- Rogers’ <i>100 Amazing Facts About the Negro with complete proof</i> and Gates’ <i>Finding Your Roots</i>  Quiz/Notes Submission
<b>Unit 3</b>  <i>Scriptures</i>	<b>Thursday 9/9</b> “Sacred Words, Stories, Writings, and Books” (Myhre)  <b>Tuesday 9/14</b> “Africans and the Bible” (Gomez)

	<p><b>Thursday 9/16</b>  Lab--Afrocentrism and the Bible--Select Passages</p> <p>Quiz/Notes Submission</p>
<p><b>Unit 4</b>   <i>Scriptures cont'd</i></p>	<p><b>Tuesday 9/21</b>  "Africans and the Islamic World" (Gomez)</p> <p><b>Thursday 9/23</b>  Lab--Afrocentrism and the Qur'an &amp; Sunnah--Select Passages</p> <p>Quiz/Notes Submission</p>
<p><b>Exam 1</b></p>	<p><b>Due on Blackboard by Tuesday, September 28 at 11:59pm.</b></p>
<p><b>Unit 5</b>   <i>Truth-Regimes</i></p>	<p><b>Thursday 9/30</b>  "Religion as Truth-Claims" (Myhre)</p> <p><b>Tuesday 10/5</b>  "Transatlantic Moment and the Dawn of Modernity" (Gomez)</p> <p><b>Thursday 10/7</b>  Lab--African Traditional Religions</p> <p>Quiz/Notes Submission</p>
<p><b>Unit 6</b>   <i>Ethics and Constitution</i></p>	<p><b>Tuesday 10/12</b>  "Religious Ethics, Moral Values, and Standards for Human Conduct" (Myhre)</p> <p><b>Thursday 10/14</b>  "Enslavement" (Gomez)</p> <p><b>Tuesday 10/18</b></p>

	<p>Lab--Phyllis Wheatley, David Walker's <i>Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World</i>, and Olaudah Equiano's <i>The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano</i>--Excerpts</p> <p>Quiz/Notes Submission</p>
<p><b>Unit 7</b></p> <p><i>Violence and Negrophobia</i></p>	<p><b>Thursday 10/21</b>  "Violence and Religion" (Myhre)</p> <p><b>Tuesday 10/26</b>  "Asserting the Right to Be" (Gomez)</p> <p>October 27 is the last day to drop the course with a "W."</p> <p>Lab--Vodun, Santeria, Candomblé--African Traditional Religions in Diaspora</p> <p>Quiz/Notes Submission</p> <p><b>Thursday 10/28 (No Class--Midsemester Study Break)</b></p>
<p><b>Unit 8</b></p> <p><i>Aesthetics, Affect, and Constructions of the "Sacred"</i></p>	<p><b>Tuesday 11/2</b>  "An Aesthetic Approach to Religion" (Myhre)  Lab--cont'd</p> <p><b>Thursday 11/4</b>  "Reconnecting" (Gomez)</p> <p><b>Tuesday 11/8</b>  Lab--Dropping (Moorish) Science</p> <p>Quiz/Notes Submission</p>
<p><b>Exam 2</b></p>	<p><b>Due on Blackboard by Thursday, September 11 by 11:59pm.</b></p>

<p><b>Unit 9</b></p> <p><i>Identity Politics</i></p>	<p><b>Tuesday 11/16</b>  “Social Activism and Engagement” (Myhre)</p> <p><b>Thursday 11/18</b>  “Movement People” (Gomez)</p> <p><b>Tuesday 11/23 (No Class Meeting)</b>  Film Watch and Movie Review Blog Post due by 11:59pm. You will have the option to submit a revised blog post during the final.</p> <p>Quiz/Notes Submission</p> <p><b>Thursday 11/25 (No Class Meeting)</b></p>
<p><b>Unit 10</b></p> <p><i>Ideology</i></p>	<p><b>Tuesday 11/30</b>  “Global Africa in the Era of Mandela and Obama” *Optional--Counts as an extra single interactive notebook assignment, replacing the lowest of them.</p> <p><b>Thursday 12/2</b>  Final project work day in class. Optional Exam 3 is provided at the beginning of class. It will be due during the final.</p>
<p><b>Final Project</b></p>	<p><b>Due on Blackboard by Wednesday, December 8, 2021, 12:30pm. Optional Movie Review Blog Post Revision and Optional Exam 3 must be completed by this time.</b></p>

## CLASSROOM POLICIES

### **Attendance and Active Participation**

This course is taught from the perspective that higher education is a professional endeavor that you’ve chosen. Just as there are ramifications for not completing assignments at a job, there are ramifications for not completing assignments in the class. Your participation is assumed as they are central to the course. While there are measures in place to allow for some flexibility (i.e. quiz policy) and opportunities to significantly improve your grade (i.e. movie review blog post revision and exam policy), **there is no late work offered in this class except in emergency**

**and/or life and death situations (not to be confused with pass or fail situations).** Should you find yourself in such a position, contact the instructor within **48 hours or as soon as possible**. The instructor reserves the right to make or not make any alterations in accordance with university policy. If you are not making progress toward the completion of our SLOs and not showing satisfactory improvement or effort, I will recommend that you retake or drop the course.

I generally do not offer incompletes except in the most extreme circumstances. Should you find yourself considering an incomplete or dropping the class, **come see me first to discuss your progress**. I can only work with you if you are doing your part to work with me and with the class.

### **Office Hours and Communication**

Office hours are an opportunity for you to get one-on-one assistance with the course. I invite you to come prepared with questions and to take advantage of the opportunity. I don't worry about students who come to office hours. I worry about those who never do. Do not be afraid to ask for help learning something you don't know well. That's precisely what we're here to do.

Online communication is a wonderful convenience, but it can give a false impression of engagement. Please note that I will generally respond to emails within 48 hours of receipt during the work week. I may not see emails during the weekend or otherwise noted occasions, so please be patient. Similarly, my communications with you will happen primarily during the work week. Please use Blackboard for information not of a personal/private nature as others may have similar questions.

### UNIVERSITY POLICIES

#### **COVID-19 Adjustments**

All University faculty, staff, and students are expected to maintain a commitment to the health and safety of our campus community. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, specific health and safety standards are in place to minimize exposure and community spread on campus. In the interest of your health and safety and that of all UA students, faculty and staff, the University reserves the right to change the mode of instruction or schedule of instruction at any time, based upon prevailing public health and other guidance. While the method of delivery may change, educational instruction and opportunities will continue. As such, the University will not provide a refund of tuition, in whole or in-part, based on any such changes. Detailed information on changes in format or schedule can be found at [studentaccounts.ua.edu](http://studentaccounts.ua.edu) and [financialaid.ua.edu](http://financialaid.ua.edu).

UA students, faculty and staff are required to comply with [UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Task Force](#) guidance regarding social distancing, face coverings and other measures.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to [protect yourself and our herd](#). COVID-19 vaccines are being administered by the [University Medical Center, the Student Health Center](#) and various businesses and healthcare providers. Students who [report proof of their vaccination status](#) will receive Bama Cash as a thank you gift for doing their part.

### **Notification of Changes**

The instructor will make every effort to follow the guidelines of this syllabus as listed; however, the instructor reserves the right to amend this document as the need arises. In such instances, the instructor will notify students via Blackboard and will endeavor to provide reasonable time for students to adjust to any changes.

### **Statement on Academic Misconduct**

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official [Code of Academic Conduct](#) provided in the Online Catalog.

### **Statement On Disability Accommodations**

Contact the [Office of Disability Services \(ODS\)](#) as detailed in the Online Catalog.

### **Severe Weather Protocol**

Please see the latest [Severe Weather Guidelines](#) in the Online Catalog.

### **Pregnant Student Accommodations**

Title IX protects against discrimination related to pregnancy or parental status. If you are pregnant and will need accommodations for this class, please review the University's FAQs on the [UAct website](#).

### **Religious Observances**

Under the Guidelines for Religious Holiday Observances, students should notify the instructor in writing or via email during the first two weeks of the semester of their intention to be absent from class for religious observance. The instructor will work to provide reasonable opportunity to complete academic responsibilities as long as that does not interfere with the academic integrity of the course. See full guidelines at [Religious Holiday Observances Guidelines](#).

## **UAct Statement**

The [UAct website](#) provides an overview of The University's expectations regarding respect and civility.