



REL 226.001
AFRICAN DIASPORA RELIGIONS

Spring 2023

Instructor: Richard Newton, PhD
(v. 1/10/23)

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

Office Hours: Monday through Friday by appointment.

Office Location: MA 204

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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. **UH, 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 beyond the continent, 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 the development of this diasporic worldview, 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. 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) 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.

RELdl

Beyond our formal classroom setting, this class will make use of the Department of Religious Studies Digital Lab (RELdl). Throughout the semester, you will be getting hands-on research experience through an initiative to leverage digital tools for theorizing about the mythologizing of the African Diaspora in chronological, geographical, and discursive terms (digitallab.religion.ua.edu). We will use the lab as a site of examination of both data and your developing skills.

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 Session 2 (and Session 1, if necessary) and 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. **Participate** in class by analyzing a selected primary source using insights from Session 1 and Session 2. Take notes as these will be useful for exams.

QUIZZES:

Around session 3, you will be given a quiz over the unit—usually a ten-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 (Myhre), 2 (Gomez), and 3 (Lab), the interactive notebook pages will 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--and attempt the quiz-- you will receive a 100 for the unit's quiz, regardless of what you score on the quiz.

LAB PRACTICUM EXAMS:

This course has three lab practica that will serve as your examinations. You will be guided in an analytical task that tests your ability, as a student of religion, to work through the data of the African Diaspora. Each activity will require you to complete a set of tasks and usually complete some sort of research reflection. These activities will be in the RELdl.

You'll also submit your work from the unit lab activities. 25% of your exam grade is completion of these lab case studies for the unit. You'll submit that on Blackboard by the beginning of the practicum class session.

After your practicum is graded, you will get a chance to revise in order to receive ½ of the outstanding credit.

PRO TIP: These exams and labs should actually bring your average up as they are guided activities and/or participation. But you must be present and do the work. The practicum days require your attendance. **An unexcused absence will result in a 0 for the exam.**

FINAL PROJECT

Drawing on everything we have covered this semester, you will consider a 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?" You will have two options for how you do this:

Option 1: An Essay--You will write a 1000-word essay working through a corpus, advancing a claim to the above question using digital tools and analytical methods from class. This will require some outside research at Gorgas Library.

Option 2: Lab Intensive--You will work with a team of graduate students on an aspect of the ongoing lab project. This will require you to schedule lab hours outside of class and to work collaboratively.

EXTRA CREDIT

REL Goes to the Movies

Throughout the semester, the Department of Religious Studies shows and discusses thought-provoking films as part of the course REL310: REL Goes to the Movies. Students who attend a film viewing and discussion will receive full credit for (1) participation quiz OR 10 points on their lowest lab practicum grade in the case that they have thus far received full credit for participation (=equivalent to 2pts added to your overall course average). Students have found this to be an enriching experience. Make sure you upload a selfie of you at the film within 24 hours to Blackboard to receive credit. See [the REL310 class website](#) for the schedule [6-9 pm in TH 116: Jan 17, Feb 14, Mar 7, Apr 4, and Apr 25].

Day Lecture

The Department of Religious Studies holds an annual lecture on religion and pop culture. Your attendance at that lecture is good for full credit for a (1) participation quiz OR 10 points on their lowest lab practicum grade in the case that they have thus far received full credit for participation (=equivalent to 2pts added to your overall course average).

GRADES

Assignment Breakdown

Assignment Type	Percentage
Quizzes	20%
Lab Practicum 1	20%
Lab Practicum 2	20%
Lab Practicum 3	20%
Final Project	20%

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.**

Unit Focus	Class Sessions
Unit 0 <i>Course Orientation</i>	Classes start on Thursday 1/12. Syllabus Access Blackboard Tuesday 1/17 "What is Religion?" (Myhre, 3-14) *January 18 is the last full day to drop a course without a grade of a "W." Thursday 1/19 "How is Religion Studied?" (Myhre, 15-26)
Unit 1 <i>Scriptures, Myths and Origin Stories</i>	Tuesday 1/24 "Origin Stories and Religion: How are Religions Formed?" (Myhre, 27-40) Thursday 1/26

	<p>“Introduction” and “Antiquity” (Gomez, 1-20)</p> <p>Tuesday 1/31 and Thursday 2/2 Lab–Myth in Antiquity—Rogers’ <i>100 Amazing Facts About the Negro with complete proof</i> and Gates’ <i>Finding Your Roots</i></p> <p>Quiz/Notes Submission (Friday Feb. 3 at 11:59pm)</p>
	<p>Tuesday 2/7 “Sacred Words, Stories, Writings, and Books” (Myhre, 53-66)</p> <p>Thursday 2/9 “Africans and the Bible” (Gomez, 21-31)</p> <p>Tuesday 2/14 Lab- the Bible in Africa and Africa in the Bible--Select Passages</p> <p>Thursday 2/16 “Africans and Islam” (Gomez, 32-60)</p> <p>Tuesday 2/21 Lab--Afrocentrism and the Qur’an & Sunnah--Select Passages</p> <p>Quiz/Notes Submission (Wednesday Feb 2/22 at 11:59pm)</p>
	<p>Thursday 2/23 RELdl Lab Practicum 1–Part I *Labs due by the beginning of class.</p> <p>Tuesday 2/28 RELdl Lab Practicum 1–Part II</p> <p>Practicum assignments due by Wed 3/1 at 11:59pm.</p>

<p>Unit 2</p> <p><i>Truth-Regimes</i></p>	<p>Thursday 3/2 “Religion as Truth-Claims” (Myhre, 41-52) *Midterm Grades Due 3/3</p> <p>Tuesday 3/7 “Transatlantic Moment and the Dawn of Modernity” (Gomez, 63-89)</p> <p>Thursday 3/9 Lab--The Ethics of the Literate and Literacy in Diaspora–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>Tuesday 3/14 and Thursday 3/16– Spring Break- No Class</p> <p>Tuesday 3/21 Lab--African Traditional Religions</p> <p>Quiz/Notes Submission (Wed March 22 @ 11:59pm)</p>
	<p>Thursday 3/23 RELDl Lab Practicum 2</p> <p>Practicum assignments due by Mon 3/27 at 11:59pm.</p>
<p>Unit 3</p> <p><i>Ethics, Violence and Activism</i></p>	<p>Tuesday 3/28 “Violence and Religion” (Myhre, 97-114) OR “Religious Ethics, Moral Values, and Standards for Human Conduct” (Myhre, 79-96)</p> <p>3/29 Last Day to Drop with a “W.”</p>

	<p>Thursday 3/31 “Enslavement” (Gomez, 90-122)</p> <p>Tuesday 4/4 Social Activism and Engagement (Myhre, 115-134) OR Religion and Aesthetics (Myhre, 67-78)</p> <p>Thursday 4/6 Reconnecting (Gomez, 187-226)</p> <p>Tuesday 4/11 Lab--Vodun, Santeria, Candomble--African Traditional Religions in Diaspora</p> <p>Thursday 4/12 “Asserting the Right to Be” (Gomez)</p> <p>Tuesday 4/18 Lab-Dropping (Moorish) Science Quiz/Notes Submission (Wed April 18 @ 11:59pm)</p>
	<p>Thursday 4/20 RELdl Lab Practicum Part III</p> <p>Practicum assignments due by Friday 4/21 at 11:59pm (Last Day for Extended Assignments)</p>
<p>Final Research</p>	<p>Thursday 4/25 RELdl Lab Workday “Movement People” (Gomez, 227-262)</p> <p>Tuesday 4/27 RELdl Lab Workday “Global Africa in the Era of Mandela and Obama” (Gomez, 263-286)</p>

	4/28 Last day to withdraw.
	All final work is due on Monday May 1 at 11:59pm.

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. my quiz policy) and opportunities to significantly improve your grade (i.e. lab practicum revisions), **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.

Lab Practicum Exams and Lab Workdays (during Finals Research) are mandatory attendance. Missing these days or being a poor participant will result in a 0 for that assignment.

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.

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 and financialaid.ua.edu.

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

Getting vaccinated is the best way to [Protect 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.