

RELS 820 AFRICAN-AMERICAN RELIGIOUS STRATEGIES: MARTIN & MALCOLM

INSTRUCTOR

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OFFICE LOCATION

59 George Street

OFFICE HOURS

*2:30- 5:00 Tuesdays and
by appointment*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Martin L. King, Jr. and Malcolm X (al Hajj Malik al Shabazz) are two iconic figures in the pantheon of black religious leadership. Their profoundly influential ideas about justice, freedom, democracy and racism, along with their activist strategies and personal biographies have generated extraordinary interest over the past fifty years. Despite this, the rich and complex tradition out of which their ideas and worldviews evolved—the 300 year old religious strategies and practices employed by African-Americans—have been understudied and disconnected from their significance. This course will examine these traditions and Martin and Malcolm’s roles within them in order to shed light on both.

Our central questions will be: What are the most influential African-American religious strategies and what ideas and concerns define them? Which strategies did King and Shabazz take up? Which ones did they reject and why?

We will examine six key African-American religious strategies and practices as developed over the last three hundred years. These include: black religious nationalism (David Walker); black liberationism (Nat Turner); priestly Christianity (Richard Allen, Jarena Lee); black mysticism (Howard Thurman); black sectarianism (Father Divine), and prophetic Christianity (Marcus Garvey). We shall situate these ideas historically, noting the connections between these strategies and the unique conditions of New World Africans in North America under conditions of chattel slavery. We will also investigate the distinguishing features of their approaches to religion, emphasizing their collective investment in freedom and democracy and the specific nature of their theological foundations.

We will then turn to specific work King and Shabazz in order to assess to their specific re-appropriation of various religious sources and strategies, their contributions, and the religious legacy they bequeathed to future generations.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course will familiarize students with the major trends in African American religious history from 1800-1968. It shall also provide critical intellectual resources to address central debates in African American religious thought, American Christian theology, race and American democracy, and modernity and race.

Finally, students will have the opportunity to refine their writing, oral presentation and research skills.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students must take a timely approach to the readings (readings are due on the dates indicated below) and attend class daily with questions and insights. Additionally, students must complete three (3) essays of three-five pages in length (each is 20% of grade) on a topic that the instructor will provide one week prior to the date the essay is to be submitted (Feb 18, March 20, April 24).

Further, each student will be required to submit a final paper. The paper will count for thirty percent (30%) of the final grade and its content will be derived from both the readings and the lectures. Finally, attendance will be taken at each class session and will count for ten percent (10%) of the final grade.

TEXTS FOR COURSE (REQUIRED AND AVAILABLE AT UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORE)

- Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*
- Martin L. King, *Where Do We Go From Here*
- Jill Watts, *God, Harlem, USA: The Father Divine Story* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1992)
- Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*
- David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet, *Walker's Appeal and Garnet's Address to the Slaves of the United States of America* (Nashville, TN: The Winston Press, 1994)
- Malcolm X, *The Last Speeches* (NY: Pathfinder, 1989)

***SELECTIONS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED FROM THE FOLLOWING:

- William Andrews ed., *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the 19th Century*
- Leon Litwack and August Meier, *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*
- Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves*
- Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, [website: www.wordowner.com/garvey/]
- Martin L. King, Jr., *Strength to Love*
- Malcolm X, *Speeches* (Malcolm-x.org)
- James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*
- Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*

Week 1

Overview

January 23: Introduction and Approach

Read: Gayraud Wilmore, p. 1-52.

Recommended: Equiano,

http://history.hanover.edu/texts/equiano/equiano_contents.html)

Week 2

Modernity and Race

January 28: Setting the Stage: New World Africans and the Christian Encounter

Read: Wilmore, p. 52-73.

January 30: The Invisible Institution

Read: Walker's *Appeal* p. 11-88.

Week 3

Prophetic Liberationists

February 4: The Slave Protest Against Protestant Christianity

Read: "Nat Turner" in Litwack, Meier p. 21-40.

February 6: Resistance and the Gospel

Read: Wilmore, p. 74-108.

Week 4

Black Christian Gradualists

February 11: The Priestly Pole and the Politics of Fear

Read: "Jarena Lee" in Andrews, p. 25-47 (handout), and "Richard Allen" in Litwack, Meier p. 1-18.

February 13: The Black Church as Community

Read: Wilmore, p. 108-135 and *complete 1st essay*.

Week 5

Forms of Black Nationalism

February 18: **FIRST ESSAY DUE**

Black Segregationalism, Black Zionism, Black Emigrationism

Read: "Martin Delaney" and "Alexander Crummell," in Litwack, Meier (OCRA)

February 20: Twentieth Century Black Nationalism

Read: "Henry McNeal Turner" (OCRA)

Week 6

The Religious Movement of Marcus Garvey

February 25: US-Liberia religious symmetry

"Garvey" in Franklin and Meier, *Black Leaders of the Twentieth*

Century (Univ. of Illinois Press, 1986).

(Handout)

February 27: Garvey and Religion

Read: selections (website)

<http://www.wordowner.com/garvey/chapter3.htm>

Week 7

Garvey and Benevolent Patriarchy

March 4: Garveyism as cultural or religious nationalism

Read: White, 21-86 (OCRA).

March 6: Gender in 20th Century Black Religious life

Read: White, 87-141 (OCRA).

Week 8

Extra Christian Movements and the Critique of Black Masculinity

March 11: The "double duty" of Black Christian Women

Read: Watts, 1-71. *Essay questions distributed*.

March 13: Father Divine

Read: Watts, 72-97 and 142-178.

Week 9

The New Black Nationalism, the Old Black Patriarchy

March 18: Race and the Peace Mission Movement
. Complete second essay.

March 20: **SECOND ESSAY DUE**. Moorish Science

Read: Wilmore 167-191

Week 10

Malcolm X

April 1: From Noble Drew Ali to Elijah Muhammad

Read: Malcolm X. *The End of White World Supremacy* p. 1-80. (OCRA)

April 3: Malcolm as Black religious nationalist

Read: Malcolm X in Franklin and Meier, p. 305-329 (OCRA)

Week 11

Howard Thurman

April 8: Race Rhetoric and White fear

Read: Malcolm X, *The Last Speeches*, 23-80 and 83-90 and Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 1-65.

April 10: From Black rage to Black mysticism

Read: Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 66-120.

Week 12

Martin L. King, Jr.

April 15: From Thurman to King

Read: King, *Where do We Go From Here*, p. 1-87. *Essay questions distributed.*

April 17: A Theology of Civil Rights

Read: King, 87-157

Week 13

Martin and Malcolm

April 22: Martin and the legacy of prophetic Christian thought

Read: West, *Prophesy Deliverance!* (OCRA)

April 24: **THIRD ESSAY DUE**

FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 9