ETHNIC STUDIES 188/USP 132
AFRICAN AMERICANS, THE CHURCH, AND THE CITY

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course examines the development of an urban African-American religious tradition that develops as a result of the Great Migration. Structured thematically and historically, this class explores the impact of the migration upon African-American culture and the religious identity of African Americans. The first part of the quarter will focus on the history and development of African-American religion. The second part of the term will address urban issues confronting the "black church" and how it attempts to address them.

REQUIRED TEXTS: Available at Groundworks Books

- Milton Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*
- Clarence Taylor, *The Black Churches of Brooklyn*
- C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*
- Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion*
- Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, *African-American Religion in the Twentieth Century*
- Course Reader available from University Readers Printing Services (1-800-200-3908)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Site Visit—Participant Observation Paper (Due April 29th) 40% of grade
- Term Paper (June 3rd) 55% of grade
- Attendance and Class Participation 5% of grade
*An excellent website for information concerning African-American Christianity is [http://www.blackandchristian.com](http://www.blackandchristian.com).

More detailed assignment guidelines will be provided in class.

PART ONE: THE BLACK CHURCH IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The first part of this course is devoted to providing a historical perspective of the Black Church. It is important to understand its roots and how it has functioned in the lives of African Americans in an urban context. We will look at issues of gender roles, music, and specific case studies of Black Churches in an urban context.

WEEK ONE —WHAT IS THE BLACK CHURCH?

The “Black Church” is most stable and influential institution in African-American culture but unfortunately this term masks the diversity that exists in the African-American religious experience. This first week is devoted to understanding the beginnings and significance of this critical institution in the African-American community. Albert Raboteau’s *Slave Religion*, published more than thirty years ago, still remains the seminal text for this study.

**MONDAY**


**WEDNESDAY**

FRIDAY

WEEK TWO—UNDERSTANDING THE BLACK CHURCH IN AN URBAN CONTEXT

The Black Church’s existence was not limited to rural areas. Though invisible during slavery, it did not remain an institution that functioned secretly. The ending of the Civil War created a visible space for the black church to thrive. By the twentieth century, the black church could be felt in urban cities throughout the nation.

MONDAY

WEDNESDAY
• Dyson, “Speech is My Hammer” in the reader.

FRIDAY
• Dyson, “Searching for Black Jesus” in the reader.

WEEK THREE—THE GREAT MIGRATION

The Great Migration was a watershed event in African-American history. It marked the first significant move of African Americans to
northern cities. The result of this migration was significant in regards to racial politics and church development in northern cities. This week we will look at this phenomenon and its impact upon African-American religion.

**MONDAY**

**WEDNESDAY**
- West, “Subversive Joy and Revolutionary Patience in Black Christianity” in reader.

**FRIDAY**

**WEEK FOUR—GROWTH OF URBAN CHURCHES/STOREFRONTS**

One of the results of the Great Migration was the development of storefront churches. The proliferation of storefront churches and the increased membership in more traditional churches led to tremendous church growth. This week we will look at the development of urban churches.

**MONDAY**

**WEDNESDAY**

**FRIDAY**
WEEK FIVE—MICRO-STUDY BLACK PENTECOSTALISM IN BROOKLYN

This week we will focus on the growth of Black Pentecostal churches in Brooklyn. We will analyze their developments and their role in these major urban areas as well as the role of women in urban church development.

MONDAY

• Gilkes, “Together and in Harness” in the reader.

WEDNESDAY


FRIDAY

• Clarence Taylor, “Driven by the Spirit” in The Black Churches of Brooklyn, pp. 165-188.

WEEK SIX—A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE—BLACK WOMEN AND THE BLACK CHURCH

The pivotal role of Black women in the “Black Church” has never been contested. Their access to power, particularly in the pulpit, has been challenged, however. This week we will look at the historic role and their influence of Black women in the church.

MONDAY

WEDNESDAY
• Canon, “Introduction,” “Surviving the Blight,” “The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness,” “Womanist Perspectival Discourse and Canon Formation” in the reader.

FRIDAY
• Canon, “Womanist Interpretation and Preaching in the Black Church” in the reader.
• Grant, “Women's Experience as the Context and a Source for Doing Theology” in the reader.
• Video

WEEK SEVEN—THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOSPEL MUSIC

Sacred music has long been central in African American religious experiences. In the city, gospel music became immensely popular. The music influences the culture of the city but the city also influenced the music.

MONDAY
• Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “Rethinking Vernacular Culture: Black Religion and Race Records in the 1920’s and 1930's,” in the reader.

WEDNESDAY
• Bernice Johnson Reagon, “Twentieth-Century Gospel: As the People Moved They Sang a New Song,” in the reader.

FRIDAY
• Video
WEEK EIGHT—ANOTHER DIMENSION OF THE BLACK CHURCH:
BLACK MUSLIMS

Up until this point in our study, much of our attention has been focused on Black Protestant Christianity. Now, we will turn our focus to two other important expressions of the African-American religious tradition—Islam and Catholicism.

MONDAY
- Turner, “What Shall We Call Him,” “Muslims in a Strange Land”, and “The Name Means Everything” in the reader.

WEDNESDAY
- Turner, “Missionizing and Signifying” and “Malcolm X” in the reader.
- Dyson, “Prophetic Black Islamic Ethics” in the reader.

FRIDAY
- Video

PART TWO: ISSUES OF URBANIZATION AND ITS CHALLENGES

African Americans move into urban areas, north and south did not occur without its challenges. The promises of moving to the Promised Land were often left unfulfilled. Issues of living in urban areas confronted Black Churches, which grappled with effective means of meetings these challenges. The last two weeks of the term will be devoted to addressing these challenges and analyzing the “black church’s” response to them.

WEEK NINE—ALTERNATIVE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE BLACK CHURCH

Living in the city created a fertile environment for the growth of alternative religious movements. Many of these movements were not rooted in a Christian experience but drew many followers. Many of these alternative movements are in existence today.
MONDAY
• Fauset, Black Gods of the Metropolis, in the reader.

WEDNESDAY
• Rabbi Matthew, “Black Judaism in Harlem,” in the reader.

FRIDAY

WEEK TEN—POVERTY, HOMELESSNESS, ECONOMIC INJUSTICE, AND RACISM

In this final week, we will look at issues that every “black church” in the city must deal with. We will look at the writings of black theologians who provide us with their views and possible solutions concerning these issues.

MONDAY
Memorial Day—No Class

WEDNESDAY
GUIDE SHEET FOR SITE VISIT TO AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

• Observe the structure of the service
  *What is the first thing that takes place in the service?
  *Where is most of most of the time spent in the service?
  *Who speaks publicly and who doesn’t?

• Analyze the sermon
  *What is the subject?
  *What is the style of the sermon—narrative, rooted in theological discourse, etc.
  *How did the congregation respond to the sermon?
  *Are men only preachers in the church or are women also in the pulpit?

• Analyze the music
  *What type of music (i.e., hymns, contemporary, traditional)?
  *Who sings in the church (i.e., choir, ensemble, congregation)
  *What are the messages in the songs? Why do you think that these songs were selected? What was the reaction of the congregation? How does the music reflect or not reflect the congregation?

• Congregation
  *What is the demographic make-up of the congregation?

• Church’s History
  *What type of church is it?
  *How old is the church?
  *Where is it located?

• Personal Reflections
  *What were the strengths and weaknesses of the church?
  *How does the church attempt to meet the needs of its congregation and the community in which it is located?
LIST OF POSSIBLE CHURCHES TO ATTEND FOR SITE VISIT

METHODIST
BETHEL A.M.E.
3085 K St.
619/232/8717

BAPTIST
BAYVIEW BAPTIST CHURCH
6126 Benson Ave.
619/262/8384

PENTECOSTAL
NORTH PARK APOSTOLIC CHURCH
4079 54th ST.
619/229/2800

ST. STEPHEN’S CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST
5825 Imperial Ave.
619/262/2671

CATHOLIC
CHRIST THE KING CATHOLIC CHURCH
29 N 32nd St
619/231/8906.

TERM PAPER ASSIGNMENT FOR ES 188/USP 132

The purpose of this assignment is for you to analyze the development of a “Black Church” in an urban context. You will read several studies throughout the quarter. Use these as examples for your paper. I have provided a structure for you to follow as well:

• Explain the roles of the “Black Church” during the Great Migration.
• Identify one Black denomination, movement, or church and trace it historical development and role in a Southern California city* during this era.
• What is its history? Why was it created? When did it start? Who were the leaders?
• Where does it fit in Hans Baer and Lincoln and Mamiya’s typologies of Black Churches?
• How does it respond to the challenges posed by the social gospel? (i.e. HIV/AIDS, poverty, racism, sexism, youth, violence, classism)
• How does it fare in the city—does it grow, does it membership increase or decrease, does urbanization effect its identity? Why?
• Does it embrace or reject the elements of slave religion as discussed by Raboteau? Why or Why not?

*Please note that you cannot use the church you attended for a site visit.