Black Religion & Spirituality - Prof Darling [Wednesdays 7pm EST]

Course Syllabus

This course will explore the rich and diverse religious landscape of Black Americans, from the transatlantic slave trade to the present day. We will examine the historical, social, and cultural forces that have shaped Black American religious traditions, as well as the ways in which these traditions have influenced American society and culture.

Course Objectives

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

- Understand the historical development of Black American religions
- Identify the major figures and movements in Black American religious history
- Analyze the social and cultural significance of Black American religions
- Meaningfully reflect on the history of Black Religion and what it means for them.

Course Requirements

- Readings: Weekly reading assignments will be drawn from a variety of sources, including primary texts, scholarly articles, and historical documents.
- Class participation: Active participation in class discussions is essential.
- First Draft/Thesis
- Final paper: A paper on a topic related to Black American religion will be due at the end of the semester.

Course Schedule

Introduction to Black American Religion

- What is Black American religion?
- Why study Black American religion?

African Religions in the Diaspora

- The transatlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage
- African religious retentions in the Americas

The Rise of Black Christianity

- The Great Awakening and the conversion of enslaved Africans
- The development of independent Black churches
- The role of Black churches in the Underground Railroad

Black American Religions Today

- The diversity of contemporary Black American religious expressions
- The challenges and opportunities facing Black American religious communities
- Divergence from Christianity
    - Islam
    - 5% ers

- Black Hebrews
- Ifa Traditions
- Spirituality/Astrology

Final Paper

Students will write a 3-5 page paper on a topic related to Black American religion. The paper should be based on your understanding of the material, as well as how it relates to you in modern America. Your thesis and topic is due before Spring Break, but I will prepare you for this, and go over it at length in class.

Grading

- Class participation: 30%
- Final paper: 70%

Required Texts

- The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song by Henry Louis Gates, JR ALSO A DOCUMENTARY ON PBS.ORG FOR A LIMITED TIME!!!!!

Recommended Texts

- [Insert recommended texts here]

Additional Information

- Office hours: Wednesdays 4-6pm
- Contact information: danidarlingmusic@gmail.com
- Tiktok: @danidar1ing

First Awakening 1730 - 1740 — Thirteen colonies were very diverse: New Englanders were the “established religion”. In the religiously tolerant Middle Colonies, the Quakers, Dutch Reformed, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Congregational, and Baptist churches all competed with each other on equal terms. In the Southern Colonies, the Anglican Church was officially established, though there were significant numbers of Baptists, Quakers, and Presbyterians. At the same time, church membership was low because it had failed to keep up with population growth, and the influence of Enlightenment movement. The first stage was conviction of sin, which was spiritual preparation for faith by God's law and the means of grace. The second stage was conversion, in which a person experienced spiritual illumination, repentance, and faith. The third stage was consolation, which was searching for and receiving assurance of salvation.

In the southern Tidewater and Low Country, northern Baptist and Methodist preachers converted both white and black people. Some were enslaved at their time of conversion, while others were free. Caucasians began to welcome dark-skinned individuals into their churches, taking their religious experiences seriously while also admitting them to active roles in congregations as exhorters, deacons, and even preachers, although the last was a rarity.

The 2nd Awakening 1790 - 1840 – Similar to the First Awakening, but bigger. Methodist church rise (especially in the West and South). Focus on conversion, and establishing membership - large growth. **Introduction of salvation. Accessibility to the uneducated, everyman, introduction of emotional, individual relationship with higher power.**

Baptists and Methodists in the South preached to slaveholders and slaves alike. Conversions and congregations started with the First Great Awakening, resulting in Baptist and Methodist preachers being authorized among slaves and free African Americans more than a decade before 1800. "Black Harry" Hosier, an illiterate freedman who drove Francis Asbury on his circuits, proved to be able to memorize large passages of the Bible verbatim and became a cross-over success, as popular among white audiences as the black ones Asbury had originally intended for him to minister. His sermon at Thomas Chapel in Chapeltown, Delaware, in 1784 was the first to be delivered by a black preacher directly to a white congregation.

The message of spiritual equality appealed to many enslaved people, and, as African religious traditions continued to decline in North America, black people accepted Christianity in large numbers for the first time

Despite being called the "greatest orator in America" by Benjamin Rush and one of the best in the world by some, Hosier was repeatedly passed over for ordination and permitted no vote during his attendance at the Christmas Conference that formally established American Methodism. Richard Allen, the other black attendee, was ordained by the Methodists in 1799, but his congregation of free African Americans in Philadelphia left the church there because of its

discrimination. They founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in Philadelphia. After first submitting to oversight by the established Methodist bishops, several AME congregations finally left to form the first independent African-American denomination in the United States in 1816. Soon after, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME Zion) was founded as another denomination in New York City (Denmark Vesey AME 1818).

Denmark Vesey - enslaved in Bermuda before coming to the US and attaining his freedom. 1818 AME Church in S. Carolina, one of the biggest AME congregations in the nation (2nd largest).
1822 Bastille Day Plot (July 14, 1822) thwarted. 65 convicted, 30 + hanged.
Nat Turner Revolt - 1833 Also a carpenter and a preacher.

Early Baptist congregations were formed by slaves and free African Americans in South Carolina and Virginia. Especially in the Baptist Church, African Americans were welcomed as members and as preachers. By the early 19th century, independent African-American congregations numbered in the several hundreds in some cities of the South, such as Charleston, South Carolina, and Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia. With the growth in congregations and churches, Baptist associations formed in Virginia, for instance, as well as Kentucky and other states.

The revival also inspired slaves to demand freedom. In 1800, out of African-American revival meetings in Virginia, a plan for slave rebellion was devised by Gabriel Prosser, although the rebellion was discovered and crushed before it started. Despite white attempts to control independent African-American congregations, especially after the Nat Turner uprising of 1831, a number of African-American congregations managed to maintain their separation as independent congregations in Baptist associations. State legislatures passed laws requiring them always to have a white man present at their worship meetings

The Third Awakening 1855 - 1930 – was marked by religious activism in American history and spans the late 1850s to the early 20th century. It influenced pietistic Protestant denominations and had a strong element of social activism. **It gathered strength from the**

postmillennial belief that the Second Coming of Christ would occur after mankind had reformed the entire Earth. The Salvation Army, mass outreach to the poor.

Booker T. Washington vs W.E.B. DuBois - https://allpoetry.com/-Booker-T.-and-W.E.B.-

Alternate link

Next Steps:

- The Nation of Islam/5 % ers (Nation of Gods and Earths)/Black Hebrews
- Ifa Traditions
- Astrology/Spirituality

Week 6 - Nation of Islam, etc... Nation of Gods and Earths

Members of the Nation of Islam study the Holy Quran, worship Allah as the only God.[2] The institution believes in God's favouring dark skin people during his creation of the world and that Allah created the earliest humans, the Arabic-speaking, dark-skinned Tribe of Shabazz, whose members possessed inner divinity and from whom all people of color descend. It maintains that a scientist named Yakub then created the white race. The whites lacked inner divinity, and were intrinsically violent; they overthrew the Tribe of Shabazz and achieved global dominance. Setting itself against the white-dominated society of the United States, the NOI campaigns for the creation of an independent African-American nation state, and calls for African-Americans to be economically self-sufficient and separatist. A millenarian tradition, it maintains that Fard Muhammad will soon return aboard a spaceship, the "Mother Plane" or "Mother Ship", to wipe out the white race and establish a utopia. Members worship in buildings called mosques or temples. Practitioners are expected to live disciplined lives, adhering to strict dress codes, specific dietary requirements, and patriarchal gender roles.

Wallace Fard Muhammad established the Nation of Islam in Detroit. He drew on various sources, including Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple of America, black nationalist trends like Garveyism, and black-oriented forms of Freemasonry . He arrived in Detroit in 1930 with an ambiguous background and several aliases and proselytized syncretic Islamic teachings to the city's black population. His group taught followers to abandon their old "slave names" in favor of new names that were bestowed on new members. Fard's movement similarly taught Black pride and Black exceptionalism, saying that the black man is the "Original" man, and teaching that the white race were devils created by eugenics. The group preached abstinence from drugs, alcohol, pork, and out-of-wedlock sex.

Fard was briefly arrested, set free, and ordered by police to depart Detroit and not return. Instead he continued to return to the city, where he was spotted by police. In 1934, after repeated arrests and death threats, Fard left Detroit and ultimately disappeared.

- **Mainstream Islam:**
  - Emphasizes the oneness of God (Allah) and the prophethood of Muhammad as the final prophet.[1]
  - Believes in the Quran as the literal word of God.[2]
  - Stresses the equality of all people before God, regardless of race.[3]
  - Has established pillars of faith (like the five daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, etc.) that are universally practiced.[4]
- **Nation of Islam (NOI):**
  - Has distinct theological beliefs that differ significantly from mainstream Islamic teachings.[5]
  - Historically has held beliefs that W.D. Fard Muhammad was Allah in person.[6]
  - Elijah Muhammad, the leader after Fard, was considered a prophet.
  - Has teachings that emphasize Black supremacy and separatism.[7]
  - Has interpretations of the Quran and other religious texts that are unique to the organization.[8]
  - While using some Islamic terminology and practices, its theology is considered by mainstream Muslims to be outside the bounds of traditional Islam.[9]

Belief in Wallace Fard Muhammad:

- The NOI believes that Wallace Fard Muhammad, who founded the organization in

1930, was Allah (God) incarnate.

Elijah Muhammad as a Messenger:

- Elijah Muhammad, who succeeded Fard, is considered by the NOI to be a messenger of God.

Black Nationalism and Racial Theology:

- A central belief is that Black people are the original people of the world.
- The NOI teaches a distinctive racial theology, including the belief that the white race was created by a scientist named Yakub.
- They advocate for Black separatism and self-sufficiency.

The "Mother Plane":

- The NOI believes in the "Mother Plane," a giant spacecraft that they believe will play a role in future events.

Distinctive Interpretation of Islam:

- While the NOI identifies as Islamic, its interpretations of Islamic texts and its theological beliefs differ considerably from those of mainstream Sunni and Shia Islam.

Social and Political Advocacy:

- The NOI has a history of advocating for social and political change, particularly concerning the rights and well-being of Black communities.
- They have strong focus on self reliance, and community improvement.

"Five Percent" Doctrine:

- The core belief is that 85% of the world's population is unaware of the truth, 10% knows the truth but keeps it hidden, and the remaining 5% are those who know the truth and are determined to enlighten others.

Black Divinity:

- A central tenet is that Black men are the original people and are "Gods," while Black women are "Earths." This means they believe divinity is inherent within Black individuals.

Supreme Mathematics and Supreme Alphabet:

- They utilize "Supreme Mathematics" and "Supreme Alphabet," systems of interpreting numbers and letters to gain deeper understanding of themselves and the universe.

Knowledge of Self:

- The pursuit of "knowledge of self" is paramount. They emphasize self-awareness, self-reliance, and understanding one's place in the universe.

Not a Religion:

- The Nation of Gods and Earths does not consider itself a religion. They view their teachings as a way of life and a culture.

Emphasis on Teaching:

- A large part of their practice is based on teaching their knowledge to others.

Rejection of traditional god concepts:

- They reject the idea of an ethereal god, outside of themselves. They believe that the Black man is god.

The "Supreme Mathematics" is a core component of the Nation of Gods and Earths' belief system. It's not mathematics in the conventional sense, but rather a system of assigning meanings to numbers from 1 to 9, and 0. Here's a basic overview:

- **Core Concept:**
    - Supreme Mathematics is a tool used by the Nation of Gods and Earths to interpret the world and gain "knowledge of self." It's a way of understanding the relationships between things.
    - Each number represents a concept, and these concepts are used to analyze situations, words, and ideas.
- **The Numbers and Their Meanings:**
    - Here's a general breakdown:
        - 1: Knowledge
        - 2: Wisdom
        - 3: Understanding
        - 4: Culture or Freedom
        - 5: Power or Refinement
        - 6: Equality
        - 7: God
        - 8: Build or Destroy
        - 9: Born
        - 0: Cipher

Artists that align with the 5%ers:

Artists associated with Five Percent Nation music:

- **Rakim**: An MC from the conscious-rap era of the late 1980s and early 1990s
- **Big Daddy Kane**: An MC from the conscious-rap era of the late 1980s and early 1990s
- **Wu-Tang Clan**: A hip-hop group that incorporated Five Percenter numerology and racial considerations into their music
- **Busta Rhymes**: An artist who identifies as a member of the Five Percent Nation
- **RZA**: A Five Percenter who often wears a 5% Nation flag necklace
- **The death of Clarence 13X:**
    - The founder's death in 1969 created a period of adjustment. However, the group adapted by adopting a non-hierarchical leadership structure.
- **"Gang" labeling:**

    - In the 1980s, the group faced challenges due to associations with criminal activity and law enforcement labeling them as a "gang." This led to increased scrutiny and restrictions, particularly within prison systems.
    -
- **Prison restrictions:**
    - The designation as a security threat within prisons led to bans on their literature and restrictions on their practices, which limited their ability to spread their teachings.
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- **Cultural influence:**
    - Despite these challenges, the Nation of Gods and Earths has maintained a significant cultural influence, particularly in hip-hop music. This has helped to keep their teachings alive and introduce them to new generations.

Therefore, rather than a sharp decline, the Nation of Gods and Earths has experienced periods of:

- Adaptation
- Increased scrutiny
- Continued cultural influence

It's important to recognize that the group continues to exist and that its influence persists, especially within certain cultural spheres.

Homework: read the link HERE

Listen: to the song HERE and HERE

Send an email to danidarlingmusic@gmail.com with a few sentences of reflection.

IFA TRADITIONS - lesson 7

Yoruba began with the trans-African migration from East to West leading to the mid-Nile (mid-Niger) area 2,000 years ago. The Nigerian region was inhabited more than forty thousand years ago as far back as 65000 BCE. Migrators arrived between 2000 BCE and 500 BCE – the combination of East Africans who traveled and those that were indigenous was called the Nok Culture, and they settled and established Ile-Ife the sacred city of the indigenous people. During the Bronze Age, these groups were operating at high levels. Ilé-Ifẹ is famous worldwide for its ancient and naturalistic bronze, stone and terracotta sculptures, dating back to between 1200 and 1400 CE.

In antiquity the Yoruba lived in ancient Egypt before traversing across a kinder Sahara. A comparison of their languages, religious beliefs, customs, names of people, places, and things solidified their origins. King Oduduwa was the first king, and his descendants ventured out in 1400 CE across southern Sudan and conquered parts of the great tropical forest - centuries of glory followed and re-established Ile-Ife as the spiritual capital.

Islamic jihads swept through Africa from coast to coast from 7th to 19th Century. With attack from both Europeans and Arabs the Yoruba nation the Yoruba nation fell. They were enslaved by both Arabs on the East coast and central regions, and they were the largest number of slaves that were enslaved for the New World. There were war prisoners that were taken to become slaves to the Yoruba initially so they were taken first, and they were the top tier of the conquered.

“The fact that the Yoruba were dragged into the slave trade in such huge numbers and so soon before the trade was brought to an end had several important consequences…their culture and religion tended to dominate the sub-culture of the slave society”

There was a merging with Christianity but the inherent spirituality of Africa was apparent, with “Negro field hollers”, spirituals, the holy ghost, shouting, speaking in tongues, intense preaching, music, etc.all harkening back to these Ifa Traditions. It gave birth to most modern day couplings of Ifa and Christianity: Santeria (Puerto Rico), Candomble (Brazil), Sango Baptise in Trinidad, Vodun (Haiti), Lucumi/Santeria (Cuba), HooDou (US).

Orunmila - Prophet of the Yoruba religion.

It was Orunmila who developed and expounded the system of esoteric worship. He became a deified personage who was elevated to the central point in the creative origin of life itself. Orunmila holds a position comparable to the “son of God” and was present in divine form when Olodumare (the Father) created all beings. Hence they both know the truth of all beings and the destiny of all beings. Orunmila is the most esoteric of the Yoruba irunmole (entities of light) acting and speaking without a physical form. There are no depictions of him, and his origins are shrouded in myth. It is said that Orunmila’s travels and teaching predated Christian-era Judaism, and that he influenced ancient Khemet (Egypt) but his focus was Ile-Ife.

Orunmila isn’t the creator of the Yoruba religion (like in Abrahamic religions). He’s the structural originator of Ifa’s transference to humankind. His name means he is the way of Salvation is only through Divine Consciousness.He is the Ibikeji Olodumare (God’s Second In Command) and is the focal point of ancient religious practice. He is said to have walked the earth around 2000 BCE.

As Orunmila matured he traveled across the continent of Africa sharing wisdom with the prophets and sages of the land. There's evidence of Orunmila's influence in ancient Khemet (Egypt) and in pre-Christian era Judaism. Yet, the potency of Orunmila's teachings were directed to the Yoruba people centered around the city of Ile-Ife. It was here that Orunmila

built his temple on Oke Tase, the Sacred Hill. It was here in Ile-Ife that Orunmila gained heavenly status. His name means “Only Heaven knows the way to salvation.” Clearly, this indicates his prophetic and messianic status among his followers.

The teachings of Orunmila provide religious aspirants with the means and potential to reach what's called in Yoruba tradition titete (alignment). By studying the Ifa corpus—the once oral scriptures passed from one generation to the next—devotees strive to reach a state of divine oneness. This oneness comes about when one's ori (earthly consciousness) is developed and elevated to the place of unification with one's iponri (heavenly consciousness). Orunmila also teaches that such an endeavor is arduous and takes years of soul-searching and effort. Those who embark on an irin ajo (spiritual journey) need to do so with a focused mind, a pure heart, and with deep sincerity, for although the attainment is glorious, the pitfalls are horribly devastating. Wisdom, ritual, and transcendence are the key elements of Orunmila's teachings, and they're bound by African cultural interpretation. There's no difference here in light of all world religions. Ayanmo (destiny), from a religious point of view, describes a person's return to the inner realization of primal essence or divine being. Orunmila proclaimed that humans must return to their divine nature or state of being, that our destiny is to reach or return to our divine state internally and heavenly, and that each of us is to live upon the earth plane existence as a reflection of that divine state. This is the supreme reason for true Ifa religious involvement. Orunmila continues in his religious corpus known as Ifa that one's destiny can be reached through:

The divinatory processes left to us by the ancestors Prescriptions of ritual and sacrifice to the spiritual dimensional beings whose forces impact upon human development and evolution

The moral ethics that humans must adhere to in order to be victorious over oppressive human acts and malevolent spirits

The ancients, or elders, who are the Ifa corpus embodied are known in total as the Odu. The Odu are comprised of sixteen heavenly prophets who existed when the earth was very young. Sent to earth by the Ara Orun (heavenly council), they imparted their divine essence and prophesized. They relied on both Orun (heavenly) and Aye (earthly life experiences) so as to relate to and then elevate the consciousness of the people. These sixteen ancients revealed themselves to Orunmila and are now said to be his heavenly disciples from a timeless cosmic eternity. Yet the name Odu comes from the name of one of Orunmila's wives. In Ifa, women play a different role than in Western religions: Women aren't the cause of sin or the separation of humans from God! Each of the Odu represents the epitome of Yoruba proverbial wisdom and religiosity. Each contains an enormous amount of ese: verses and kiki (moral teachings) expressed through the itan (mythological, historical, and social development). The priests and priestesses of Yoruba are set to learn and apply the knowledge and ancient wisdom of the Odu so as to present ways of transcendence and salvation to spiritual seekers. Each of the Oju Odu or Olodu (sixteen major Odu) and the Omo Odu or Amulu (240 minor Odu) is said to contain 1,680 verses, or moral codes, making such an endeavor a great one. And although no one is said to be able to reach such a degree, the objective is to continually strive for greater insights and understandings.

Ori - higher self (third eye)

Egun - collective energy of our ancestors

Odu/Orishas - god's and goddesses. Orunmila first as a holy Spirit type energy.

Olodumare - Creator/Father

Homework: Attend Ifa Church!

ASTROLOGY - WEEK 8

I. Introduction to Hellenistic Astrology

- **A. Definition:**
  - A system of astrology developed and practiced in the Hellenistic period (roughly 3rd century BCE to 3rd century CE) in the Mediterranean region, particularly in Alexandria, Egypt.
  - A synthesis of Egyptian, Babylonian, and Greek astrological traditions.
- **B. Historical Context:**
  - Rise of Hellenistic civilization after Alexander the Great.
  - Influence of philosophical schools (Stoicism, Platonism).
  - Development of sophisticated astronomical and mathematical techniques.
- **C. Key Characteristics:**
  - Emphasis on precise calculations and timing.
  - Use of the houses, signs, and planets in a structured system.
  - Focus on fate and the influence of celestial bodies on human life.
  - Development of techniques for predicting events.

II. Core Concepts and Techniques

- **A. The Zodiac and Signs:**
  - Fixed zodiac of 12 signs, based on the seasonal tropical zodiac.
  - Qualities of signs (e.g., cardinal, fixed, mutable; fire, earth, air, water).
- **B. The Planets:**
  - Seven traditional planets (Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn).
  - Planetary dignities and debilities (domicile, exaltation, triplicity, terms, face).
  - Planetary periods.
- **C. The Houses:**
  - Twelve houses, representing different areas of life.
  - Systems of house division (e.g., quadrant systems).
  - Meaning and significance of each house.
- **D. Aspects:**
  - Geometric relationships between planets (e.g., conjunction, opposition, square, trine, sextile).
  - Significance of aspect strength and type.
- **E. Essential Dignities and Debilities:**
  - System to determine the strenght of a planet within a chart.
  - Domicile, Exaltation, Triplicity, Term, and Face.
- **F. Lots (Parts):**

    - Calculated points in the chart, derived from planetary positions.
    - Significant Lots, such as the Lot of Fortune and the Lot of Spirit.
- **G. Time Lord Techniques:**
    - Methods to determine periods of time that are more or less significant for a person.
    - Zodiacal releasing, annual profections, and planetary periods.

Week Fitylem - Ancient Astrology (Venus/Neptune)

The transit of Neptune into Aries is a significant astrological event, and here's a breakdown of key points:

- **Timing:**
    - Neptune will enter Aries in 2025.[1] Specifically, it enters Aries on March 30, 2025.[2]
    - From approximately 1861 to 1875.
    - It will have a short retrograde back into Pisces, and then fully enter Aries again, and stay in Aries until 2039.
    - This is a long term transit, as Neptune stays in a sign for roughly 14 years.
- **Astrological Significance:**
    - Neptune represents dreams, illusions, spirituality, and the subconscious.
    - Aries represents action, initiative, courage, and a pioneering spirit.[3]
    - Therefore, Neptune in Aries suggests a blending of these energies, potentially leading to:
        - A surge of creative and spiritual inspiration.
        - A drive to act on dreams and visions.
        - A heightened sense of idealism and a desire to forge new paths.
        - Also a potential for increased impulsiveness, and decievability.
- **Potential Impacts:**
    - **Personal:** Individuals may experience a stronger urge to pursue their passions and spiritual beliefs. However, it's crucial to maintain a sense of grounding and avoid unrealistic expectations.
    - **Cultural:** This transit could spark new artistic and spiritual movements, as well as shifts in how society approaches individuality and autonomy.
    - There is also the potential for a growth in "do it yourself" culture, and a decrease in trust of large institutions.
- **Key Themes:**

- Bridging dreams with action.
- Balancing idealism with reality.
- Exploring new frontiers in creativity and spirituality.
- Increased focus on individual sovereignty.

It's important to remember that astrological interpretations are complex, and the effects of Neptune in Aries will vary depending on individual birth charts and other astrological factors.