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AAS 417.01: Prayer and Civil Rights

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AAS/HSTA 417 Prayer and Civil Rights

Autumn 2012 Tobin Miller Shearer

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:40-2:00 p.m., GBB L11

With knees bent and heads bowed, a group of fervent African-American activists prepared to pray on the sidewalks of Albany, Georgia, in 1963. A few minutes later, dour-faced police officers arrested the young people and removed them from the sidewalk to a local jail. Such pious action deserves careful scrutiny. Built around the question, “Does religion help or hinder the pursuit of social change?” this class combines historical and religious studies methods to trace changes in civil rights activists’ efforts to make use of religion. By focusing on a particular religious practice – in this case prayer – in a specific but limited period of time, this course challenges students to examine African-American history and religion from two primary perspectives. First, students will consider how historical action forms meaning, in this case through the public recitation of appeals to divine authority. Secondly, students will study the social significance of religious practice by examining how African-American Christians articulated a rationale for change, appealed to commonly held ethical values, and evoked the assurance of divine support. This course thus complicates prevailing ideas about the normalcy of African-American religious practitioners’ prayer, invites students to examine their assumptions about the nature of prayer, and traces how religion spilled out of sanctuaries into the streets.

Objectives: students will be able to –

- ask purposeful questions about religious practice and answer them creatively;
- differentiate among and explain the major characteristics of the ritualistic, rhetorical, and political aspects of Christian prayers;
- identify significant shifts in the Civil Rights Movement between 1948 and 1976 and describe where, when, and how civil rights actors used prayer in public;
- use resources from the disciplines of African-American history and religious studies to analyze primary source documents;
- develop, revise and defend written arguments explaining the meaning of a specific instance of public prayer.

Assignments:

Each week’s classes will include input on religious theory and African American history, opportunities for student discussion, topical readings, and regular writing assignments. In all classroom activities, students will draw on readings from both religious studies theory and African-American civil rights history. This course is designed to support each student in writing a 20-page primary source-based research paper that analyzes a set of primary sources including video footage of prayers by grassroots civil rights activists, written prayers, and sound recordings of civil rights activists giving public prayers. The research paper will be submitted once as a research topic, once as an outline, once as an initial draft, once as a second draft, and once as a final draft with the expectation that each draft will improve upon the previous one. In order to receive full credit for the paper, each draft must be submitted in full. This course fills the “W” writing requirement or the History department Upper Division Writing requirement.

Grading:

Participation – 40%

Research paper – 60%

Each day you earn points for your participation. If you attend, show evidence of having read the assigned reading, and contribute to the class discussion, you will receive four points for that day. You can earn up to 108 points in the course of the semester out of a 100-point scale (which gives you two days of unexcused absence if you need them or a chance to improve your overall grade by attending every day and doing the readings). Points will be posted each class day on the course Moodle site. If you are absent for an excused reason, you will need to write a one-page, single-spaced reflection on the week's reading for each day missed due one week after the excused absence.

Each research paper is worth 200 points. You can earn those points in the following manner:

- 1) turn in a clearly focused research topic by the assigned date = 15 points
- 2) turn in a paper outline:
 - a. on time = 5 points
 - b. meets minimum length requirement = 5 points
 - c. identifies the ten secondary sources that will be used = 10 points
- 3) turn in draft one of a research paper:
 - a. on time = 5 points
 - b. meets minimum length requirement (19 ½ pages) = 10 points
 - c. is written with complete sentences in standard paragraph form = 5 points
 - d. includes two student-identified primary sources plus those provided in class = 5 points
- 4) turn in draft two of a research paper:
 - a. on time = 5 points
 - b. meets minimum length requirement (19 ½ pages) = 10 points
 - c. is written with complete sentences in standard paragraph form = 5 points
 - d. includes two student-identified primary sources plus those provided in class = 5 points
 - e. demonstrated clear improvement on previous draft = 5 points
- 5) turn in final draft of research paper
 - a. on time = 10 points
 - b. meets all criteria of the research paper rubric = 100 points (pro-rated according to grade scale below)

Grade scale:

A+ 98-100 A 93-97 A- 90-92 B+ 87-89 B 83-86 B- 80-82
C+ 77-79 C 73-76 C- 70-72 D+ 67-69 D 63-66 D- 60-62 F ≤59

Class size:

Enrollment is limited to 25 students.

Classroom etiquette:

I expect that all students will join me in creating a supportive and focused learning environment by:

- turning off all cell phones (and thus doing no texting, e-mailing or instant messaging);

- using laptops only for note taking;
- not doing crosswords, reading newspapers, or other recreational activities;
- not talking or whispering with fellow classmates unless instructed to do so.

During lectures, I will give you my complete attention. I ask the favor of the same from my students. Should a student's behavior interrupt our learning environment, he or she will first be given a private verbal warning. Upon second infraction, the student will receive a public warning. Should disruptive behaviors continue following two warnings, the student will be issued a warning in writing. Any subsequent disruptive behaviors will be turned over to the University's disciplinary committee.

Instructor contact:

I maintain regular office hours that I will post on the course website. You are also welcome to contact me by e-mail. My goal is to respond within 24 hours. In case of emergency, you may contact me by phone as listed on the course website.

Missed deadlines:

My goal is always to encourage your best work in the midst of multiple classroom demands and real life emergencies. Limited deadline extensions can be arranged if the student makes advance contact. Late papers or projects will be marked down a grade/day. Make-up exams will not be offered unless they are arranged along with appropriate documentation from medical, athletic or administrative officials.

Academic honesty:

Stealing someone else's ideas is the same as stealing someone's property. Cite others' ideas in standard footnote or endnote format (in written work and all projects). Paraphrase whenever possible. In general, a paraphrase uses no more than three of the same words in a sentence as the original source. See: <http://ordway.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/name/StudentConductCode> for a full review of the University of Montana's student conduct code.

Accessibility:

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154 or visit their website <http://www.umt.edu/disability>. I will work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.

Readings:

Chapman, Mark L. *Christianity on Trial: African-American Religious Thought before and after Black Power*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.

Marsh, Charles. *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Payne, Charles M. *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Wuthnow, Robert. *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998.

Course pack (available on course website):

- Alexander, Bobby Chris. "Correcting Misinterpretations of Turner's Theory: An African-American Pentecostal Illustration." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (1991): 26-44.
- Balmer, Randall. "Mississippi Missions." In *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, expanded ed., 176-192. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Bell, Catherine M. "Constructing Ritual." In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 19-29. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- "Constructing Meaning." In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 30-46. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Costen, Melva Wilson. "Worship in the Invisible Institution." In *African American Christian Worship*, 2nd. ed., 25-37. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007.
- Findlay, James. "Churches Join the Movement." In *The Civil Rights Movement*, edited by Paul A. Winters, 141-49. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000.
- "Religion and Politics in the Sixties: The Churches and the Civil Rights Act of 1964." *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 1 (1990): 66-92.
- Garrow, David J. "Religious Resources and the Montgomery Bus Boycott." *Criterion* 34 (1995): 2-9.
- James, William. "The Reality of the Unseen." In *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 53-76. New York: Random House, 1902.
- "Mysticism." In *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 379-429. New York: Random House, 1902.
- Krause, Neal, and Linda M. Chatters. "Exploring Race Differences in a Multidimensional Battery of Prayer Measures among Older Adults." *Sociology of Religion* 66, no. 1 (2005): 23-43.
- Livingston, James C. "Sacred Ritual." *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion*, 80-103. New York: Macmillan, 1989.
- Moore, R. Laurence. "The African Future of Christianity." In *Touchdown Jesus: The Mixing of Sacred and Secular in American History*, 89-108. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- Orsi, Robert A. "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion." In *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, edited by David D. Hall, 3-21. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Smart, Ninian. "Introduction." *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*, 1-26. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Zaleski, Philip, and Carol Zaleski. "The Ecstatic." In *Prayer: A History*, 158-194. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005.
- "Prayer and the Public Square." In *Prayer: A History*, 294-310. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005.

Schedule:

Week 1 - August 28 & 30: Introduction to course, religion, civil rights movement
Reading due Thursday: Zaleski and Zaleski. "Prayer and the Public Square."

Week 2 – September 4 & 6: In-class intensive writing workshops
Research Paper topic due by Wednesday at midnight.

Week 3 - September 11 & 13 : Religious Theory 1 – What is religion?
Readings due Thursday, James, "The Reality of the Unseen"; Smart.

Week 4 – September 18 & 20: Religious Theory 2 – What is ritual? Input on library research resources.
Readings due Thursday, Alexander; Bell, "Constructing Ritual"; Livingston.

Week 5 – September 25 & 27: Religious Theory 3 – What is prayer?
Readings due Thursday, Bell, "Constructing Meaning;" James, "Mysticism"; Zaleski and Zaleski, "The Ecstatic."

Week 6 – October 2 & 4: The Broad American Religious Context
Reading due Thursday, Wuthnow.
Research Paper Outline due by Wednesday at midnight.

Week 7 – October 9 & 11: African-American Religious Context
Readings due Thursday, Costen; Krause and Chatters; Moore.

Week 8 – October 16 & 18: Civil Rights Movement 1 – 1940-1955
Reading due Thursday, Garrow.

Week 9 – October 23 & 25: Civil Rights Movement 2 – 1956-1963
Reading due Tuesday, Findlay. "Churches Join the Movement."
No class on Thursday, attend one session of Day of Dialogue and sign in instead.

Week 10 – October 30 & November 1: Civil Rights Movement 3 – 1964-1974
Readings due Thursday, Balmer; Findlay. "Religion and Politics in the Sixties."
Research Paper Draft 1 due by Wednesday at midnight.

Week 11 – November 8: Major themes in Civil Rights Movement historiography
No class on Tuesday, election day. Exercise your right to vote!
Reading due Thursday, Orsi.

Week 12 – November 13 & 15: Reading Prayer into Civil Rights Movement History
Reading due Thursday, Marsh.
Research Paper Draft 2 due by Wednesday at midnight.

Week 13 – November 20 & 22: No classes. Writing and revision week and Thanksgiving break.

Week 14: November 27 & 29: Reading Prayer out of Civil Rights Movement History
Reading due Thursday, Payne.

Week 15 – December 4 & 6: Thinking Faith into African-American Religion
Reading due Thursday, Chapman.

Research Paper Final Draft due by Wednesday at midnight.