

Draft as of April 8, 2020

What on Earth is Religion
Religious Studies 1B03 (RELIGST 1B03)
ONLINE
McMaster University
Spring 2020

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Consultation: by email.

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What We're Asking; What We're Doing

What is “religion”? What does it mean to *do religion* or to *be religious*? What is the relationship between religion and culture? How do artists in North American hip-hop culture *do religion* or *be religious*? We will look at religion in relationship to culture, gender, race, power, etc. We discuss what Malory Nye calls the basics of religion, a rubric for critically thinking about *how people do, use, or represent religion* in their cultural worlds. By way of case-study, we will focus on religion in hip-hop culture, seeing how scholars in this field have been talking about the *idea of religion* as something betwixt and between issues of culture and the human quest for meaning.

So, What You're Learning is

1. How to critically engage question(s) of religion and culture.
2. How to think about religion as something people talk about and do as opposed to as an essence.
3. How to think about religion in noninstitutional contexts, such as in hip-hop culture.

What You're NOT Learning is

1. How to argue for or against any religious truth-claims (e.g. whether god really exists).
2. How to be a better religious practitioner and advocate.
3. A bunch of religious theory and method, although you certainly will encounter some of it.

What We're Reading

Nye, Malory. *Religion: The Basics*. Second Edition. New York: Routledge. 2008. An e-book version (2003) is available through McMaster's library.

Reading material on religion and hip-hop culture will be available online via Avenue to Learn (A2L). You will have at least two readings per week (about forty to fifty pages). Pre-recorded lectures and supplementary media in each module will help with the readings.

Workload & Evaluations

A Discussion Notebook: Six Entries (30%)

Students will write six entries on our weekly content. They will compile these entries into a single document (pdf) that will be submitted **on Avenue by June 23rd**. Each entry will involve short written responses on anywhere between two to three discussion prompts around the course material, mainly our readings on religion in hip-hop culture. I am not expecting formal essays, although you will include a carefully written preface (about 500 words) at the very beginning of the document that introduces your collection of entries. The preface, which I recommend that you write only after having completed your entries, should introduce the document, explaining how the entries therein wrestles with the *idea of religion* as a cultural phenomenon. This is a cumulative project that assesses your comprehension of the course's thesis. More details on the logistics of this project will be delivered on Avenue. Suffice it to say that prompts for each entry will be uploaded on Avenue in the module for that week. I encourage to work on this project week by week as the prompt for that week is released.

Four Tests (70%)

Students will write four tests on Avenue. The tests will be straightforward. They may consist of multiple choice, true/false, and/or short answer responses. These exercises will evaluate your engagement and comprehension of our weekly course material. The tests will be released on Avenue on the Thursday (10am) prior to its due date. Further details about these online evaluations will be delivered on Avenue.

Test Schedule

Test 1 (M1 & 2): May 14th – May 17th (15%)

- “Religion” and “Culture and Religion”

Test 2 (M3): May 21st – May 24th (15%)

- Religion and Power

Test 3 (M4): May 28th – May 31st (20%)

- Religion and Gender

Test 4 (M5 & 6): June 11th – June 14th (20%)

- Religion, Belief, and Ritual

Course Schedule

The instructor may change this schedule at his discretion. Other weekly content (videos, podcasts, etc.) will be on Avenue to Learn under the folder for each module.

Module 1 (May 4th – May 8th)

What is “Religion”

Read: “Religion: Some Basics” in Nye, pgs. 1-22.

Read: Christopher Driscoll. 2011. “What is this ‘Religious’ in Hip-Hop Culture: Introductions” *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 40, no. 3: 1 – 3

Module 2 (May 11th – May 15th)

Religion and Culture

Read: “Culture” in Nye, pgs. 23-56.

Read: Anthony B. Pinn and Monica Miller. 2009. “Introduction: Intersections of Culture and Religion in African American Communities.” *Culture and Religion* 10, no. 1: 1-9.

Module 3 (May 18th – 22nd)

Religion and Power

Read: “Power” in Nye, pgs. 57-78.

Read: Joseph Winters. 2011. “Unstrange Bedfellows: Hip-Hop and Religion.” *Religion Compass* 5, no. 6: 260-270.

Recommended Read: Josef Sorett. 2009. “Believe Me, This Pimp Game is Very Religious: Toward a Religious History of Hip-Hop.” *Culture and Religion* 10, no. 1: 11-22.

Module 4 (May 25th – May 29th)

Religion and Gender

Read: “Gender” in Nye, pgs. 79-104.

Read: Tamara Lomax. 2011. “In Search of our Daughters’ Gardens: Hip-Hop as a Womanist Prose.” *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 40, no. 3: 15 – 20.

Recommended Read: Rebecca Kumar. 2018. “Let Your Booty do that Yoga: Black Goddess Politics.” *Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations, The Scholar and Feminist Online* 14, no.3.

Module 5 (June 1st – June 5th)

Religion and Belief

Read: “Belief” in Nye, pgs. 105 -128

Read: Sipiwe Ignatius Dube. 2010. “Hate Me Now: An Instance of NAS as Hip-Hop’s Self-proclaimed Prophet and Messiah.” *Religious Studies and Theology* 29, no. 2:171-190.

Module 6 (June 8th – June 12th)

Religion and Ritual

Read: “Ritual” in Nye, pgs. 129-151.

Read: Elonda Clay. 2009. “Two Turntables and a Microphone: Turntablism, Ritual, and Implicit Religion.” *Culture and Religion* 10, no. 1: 23-38.

Module 7 (June 15th – June 19th)

Religion and Texts

Read: “Texts” in Nye, pgs. 152-181.

Read: Monica R. Miller. 2011. “Don’t Judge a Book by Its Cover!” *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 40, no. 3: 26 – 31.

University Policies

Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#), located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- Improper collaboration in group work.
- Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via Avenue to Learn (A2L) plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish to submit their work through A2L and/or Turnitin.com must still submit an electronic and/or hardcopy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com or A2L. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Avenue to Learn (A2L)

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn (A2L). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the

same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. [Student Accessibility Services](#) can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

McMaster Student Absence Form

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”. Please submit MSAFs shortly before an assignment’s due date.

Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a RISO accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.