

***AAAS 81.4: The Black Church and Black Bodies: Race, Sexuality, and  
Class in Religious Culture***  
**2014 Summer Course: Dartmouth College**

Professor: Dr. Sandra L. Barnes (Vanderbilt University: Department of Human and Organizational Development and the School of Divinity)  
Class Period: Ten week period, 3 hour seminar once weekly  
Office: TBA  
Office Hours: Twice weekly and by appointment  
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(Feel free to contact me via any of the above methods. I will reply promptly.)

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

Existing studies and recent media attention remind us of the continued challenges Black churches face in proactively understanding and responding to issues of race, sexuality, and class – and how these dynamics influence inclusivity and equality both inside and outside church walls. Although they are often considered taboo, it is imperative to discuss these topics. This course will focus on ideas, approaches, and frameworks that have informed the historic and contemporary Black Church regarding race, sexuality, and class (and their nexus). The course will also provide a sociological perspective for understanding and analyzing how Black congregations have endeavored to understand, socialize, and in some instances, control Black bodies as well as some of the spiritual and practical implications. Students will be introduced to Cultural Theory as a paradigm to illumine potentially sensitive, polarizing issues among Black churches. The course is designed to: encourage and stimulate critical thinking beyond “common sense” interpretations of race, sexuality, and class in the Black Church tradition; promote candid dialogue; and, help develop implementable best practices. The focus of the course will be on a careful reading and critical evaluation of classic and contemporary texts with the goal of helping students develop a sophisticated theoretical grounding from which to approach these themes. At the completion of this course students are expected to demonstrate: a knowledge and understanding of theories and perspectives about how members of the Black community negotiate church spaces and factors such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and age influence intra-group dynamics, religious culture, inequality, diversity, oppression, and social justice.

**COURSE CONTENT:**

**Required Books:**

Barnes, Sandra. 2012. *Live Long and Prosper: How Black Megachurches Address HIV/AIDS and Poverty in the Age of Prosperity Theology*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Barnes, Sandra. 2010. *Black Megachurch Culture: Models for Education and Empowerment*. New York: Peter Lang Press.

Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend. 2001. *If it Wasn't For the Women*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Lincoln, C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. 1990. *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*. Durham: Duke University Press.

McKinney, Lora-Ellen. 2005. *Getting to Amen: 8 Strategies for Managing Conflict in the African American Church*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press.

West, Cornel. 1993. *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Wimberly, Anne Streaty, Sandra Barnes, and Karma Johnson. 2013. *Claiming Hope: Youth Ministry in the Black Church*. New York: Judson Press.

**Required Articles:**

Barnes, Sandra. 2006. "Whosoever Will Let *Her* Come: Gender Inclusivity in the Black Church." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

Barnes, Sandra. 2009. "Religion and Rap Music: An Analysis of Black Church Usage." *Review of Religious Research* 49(3): 319-338.

Fullilove, Mindy Thompson and Robert E. Fullilove. 1998. "Homosexuality and the African American Church: The Paradox of the 'Open Closet'" Retrieved Dec. 2000 from <http://hivinsite.ucsf.edu/topics/african-american/2098.3803.html>.

Ward, Elijah. 2005. "Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church." *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 7(5): 493-504.

Note: Additional handouts and readings may be provided.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

***Examinations and Assignments (mandatory):***

Course grades will be based on the following:

Reflection Paper	35%
Examination	30%
Class Presentation	20%
Attendance/Class Participation	<u>15%</u>
Total	100%

***Class Presentation:*** Each student will give a 10 minute presentation about a topic germane to the class, but not directly covered in class. Presentations will be graded based on a list of criteria to be provided by the professor. All presentations must include a social media component. The best presentations provide a clear, concise summary of the topic, reflect the scope and focus of the course, are timely, and exhibit creativity on the part of the presenter. Students should also be prepared to respond to a short Q & A session after their presentations. A 2 - page summary of the topic should be submitted at

the time of the presentation.

**Examinations:** There is one in-class examination to evaluate students' knowledge of the material in the readings and lectures and will be about 5-7 pages in length. The exam week is provided on the syllabus. The examination will include a combination of concept-related, short-answer, essay, and application questions.

**Reflection Paper:** The Reflection Paper is the most important assignment for this class. This paper consists of both library research and analyses on an article germane to the course topic, but not directly covered in class. We will discuss the exact format of the paper in class. The paper should be typed, double-spaced and 10 pages in length.

**Attendance/Class Participation:** Students are expected to attend class regularly, on time, and be prepared to participate in class assignments and discussions. Attendance will be taken during each class. Attendance is strongly recommended because most of the course material will be explained more fully during lectures and discussions. Two unexcused absences will result in the lowering of the course grade by one letter grade. If you are absent, be sure to get the notes from a classmate. Students with special academic needs should notify the professor during the first week of classes such that the appropriate arrangements can be made to facilitate their participation in the course.

**Grading:** Assignments will be graded as follows:

90 - 100 = A  
80 - 89 = B  
70 - 79 = C  
60 - 69 = D  
Below 60 = F

Grades will not be verbally reported over the telephone or provided via e-mail.

**Late Assignments and Exams:** Unless students provide a justifiable explanation, the exam must be taken as scheduled. No make-up exams will be permitted unless there is an emergency situation and you contact me within 48 hours of the exam date. Late assignments will not be accepted without penalty unless there is an emergency situation and you contact me within 24 hours of the due date. Otherwise, a late assignment will be penalized one letter grade for each class that it is late. Failure to complete the examination or research paper will automatically result in a failing course grade.

**Overall Course Grade:**

To determine overall course grades, no special extra credit assignments will be given, late assignments cannot be turned in at the end of the semester, and grades will not be curved.

**Cheating/Plagiarism:**

Ethical conduct is expected. Violation of the cheating /plagiarism policy will result in a grade of "F" for the course. Refer to the Dartmouth College catalog for additional information regarding this topic.

***Course Environment:***

Certain topics often elicit a variety of comments and opinions. Your input is important and encouraged. Students will be expected to provide meaningful, positive input and maintain respectful interaction with the professor and fellow classmates. Each student is expected to help create a learning environment that is free from discrimination, intimidation, and harassment.

**REQUIRED READING:**

(The outline below is subject to change as dictated by class needs and at the professor's discretion. Chapters and/or articles should be read *prior* to the day assigned.)

***Week 1: Course Introductions, Class Introductions, and Syllabus Review***

Students will be introduced to foundational concepts and themes from sociology in general and the sociology of religion in particular that will inform the entire semester. Concepts such as Black Church, Black megachurch, sociological imagination, social construction of reality, Cultural theory, ethnocentrism, cultural relativity, sexuality, and Black sacred cosmos will help provide students with the requisite information to master class requirements.

Readings: Lincoln and Mamiya (Chapter 1)  
McKinney (Chapter 1-5)  
West (Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 7)

***Week 2: Familial Dynamics***

This week will focus on understanding relationships between the Black Church and Black families, with particular attention on issues related to youth and children. The discussion will consider both the family- and child-centeredness of the historic Black Church and related benefits and challenges.

Readings: Lincoln and Mamiya (Chapter 11)  
Wimberly, Barnes, and Johnson (*Claiming Hope*)  
Barnes ("Religion and Rap Music")

***Week 3: Gender Dynamics - Males***

This week will focus on issues of sexuality, common historic Black Church gender dynamics as well as specific presentations of Black masculinity both past and present.

Readings: Barnes (*Black Megachurch Culture*: Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 4)  
Ward ("Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church")  
**Submit Reflection Paper Outline**

***Week 4: Gender Dynamics - Females***

This week will focus on issues of sexuality, common historic Black Church gender dynamics as well as specific presentations of Black femininity both past and present.

Readings: Gilkes (*If it Wasn't For the Women*)  
Barnes ("Whosoever Will Let *Her* Come: Gender Inclusivity in the Black Church")  
Lincoln and Mamiya (Chapter 10)  
McKinney (Chapter 6)

***Week 5: Black Christianity in Context - Demographic and Denominational Differences***

This week will compare and contrast demographic and denominational differences in the Black Church tradition, paying particular attention to how congregants and community members negotiate church and community spaces.

Readings: Lincoln and Mamiya (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)  
McKinney (Chapter 8, 10)

***Week 6: Sexuality and HIV/AIDS***

This week will consider common trials and triumphs associated with Black Church responses to sexual minorities and the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the Black community. Specific attention will be paid to Black megachurch responses to topics such as sexuality and sexual minorities as well as programmatic responses to HIV/AIDS.

Readings: Barnes (*Live Long and Prosper* – Introduction, Chapters 1-3)  
Fullilove, Thompson, and Fullilove ("Homosexuality and the African American Church")  
McKinney (Chapter 7)  
Movie: "Tongues Untied"

***Week 7: Radicalism and Routinization***

This week will focus on Black Church examples of radicalism and routinization. Students will be exposed to historic and contemporary instances of prophetic as well as priestly responses by Black congregations to social problems in the Black community.

Readings: Lincoln and Mamiya (Chapters 7, 8, 9)  
McKinney (Chapter 9)

***Week 8: The Church and the New Millennium***

This week will examine the place and role of the Black Church in the contemporary religious market in general and the implications of large Black congregations as specific responses to modernity, globalization, and religious consumerism. Students will be challenged to consider ways that the current Black Church can more effectively address issues related to sexuality, race, and class to foster inclusivity, equality, and social justice.

Readings: Barnes (*Black Megachurch Culture*: Chapters 3, 5, Conclusion)  
Barnes (*Live Long and Prosper* – Chapter 4, Conclusion)

McKinney (Chapters 11, 12)

***Week 9: Class Presentations***

In addition to completing any earlier reading assignments, student presentations will take place.

***Week 10: Final Examination and Closing***

Students will complete an in-class examination.

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Reflection Paper

Each student is required to write a critical review on a topic related to race, sexuality, class, and the Black Church. The paper should be based on an article from an academic journal (example, Journal of Black Studies, Sociological Focus, Social Forces, Western Journal of Black Studies, and American Journal of Sociology). **The selected article must be attached to your paper.** You should begin with a review and discussion of the article and expand by linking the article to classroom material and critiquing the article using information presented in class. You will be expected to submit a synopsis of your paper topic and bibliography for acceptance **prior** to writing your paper.

A well-written paper will include the following:

- a. Summary of the selected academic article
- b. Summary of Cultural Theory *and* a thorough analysis of the academic paper based on this framework
- c. *At least* 4 references/linkages to course readings within the paper
- d. Critique of the academic article (academic and applied)
- e. Reference page with complete citations of all articles/books noted in the paper

Papers are to be no longer than 10 pages in length, typed and double-spaced. This length limitation will require you to write concisely about your chosen topic. Be sure to use 1-inch margins on all sides, 11 or 12 point font size, and check your paper for spelling and grammatical mistakes. The best papers will be organized and thorough, yet concise.

Example of acceptable paper topics:

1. Gender Discrimination among Protestant Clergy
2. Teen Pregnancy: How Black Church Leaders Respond Based on Class
3. Spirituality among Black “Down-Low” Men
4. Views about Interracial Marriage in the Black Church Tradition
5. How the AIDS Pandemic Has Impacted Poor Black Christians