

Harold V. Bennett, PhD  
Office: 112 Sale Hall  
Telephone: 470-639-0230  
[harold.bennett@morehouse.edu](mailto:harold.bennett@morehouse.edu)

REL 465 T (6-8:40PM)  
109 Sale Hall  
Spring 2019  
Student Hours: By Appointment Only

*REL 465: The "Other" in the Hebrew Bible and in African-American Social Ethics*

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

It is axiomatic in studies on Religion and Public life in the United States that America is not just a theistic nation, but that it is a Christian nation. Especially in the American south, Christianity is major feature that informs beliefs about the holy, social theorizing, and notions about it means to be a person in the world. The Christian Bible in general, and the first part of this document, the Hebrew Bible (hereafter cited as HB) in particular, is a significant building block for frameworks that seek to determine ethical conduct amongst Christians. It is important to note that the HB contains information on a variety of moral subjects that received treatment in ancient Israel and data on how subgroups in ancient Israel wrestled with these issues and sought to order life in the private and corporate spheres. Questions about what kind of person the moral agent should be and how he/she should act, too, receive treatment in this collection of texts.

According to a 2018 report published by the PEW Research Center on Religion and Public Life, eighty percent of African-Americans self-identify as Christian.<sup>1</sup> Since eighty percent of African-Americans self-identify as Christian, it stands to reason that the HB is a popular source for determining "what one should do" and "how one should be" in the world today. It, therefore, logically follows that texts in the HB are important bases amongst Blacks for envisioning their social world and for postulating claims about what counts as either a praiseworthy or a blameworthy act in societies in which they find themselves.<sup>2</sup> In recognition of the Christian "meta-narrative" that frames the story of America, the present course will engage texts and terms in the HB. The focus will be to delineate the "Other" and examine treatments of the "Other" in ancient Israelite society. The objective of this entire study is to formulate a hermeneutic that facilitates the appreciation of cultural diversity, individuality, and the humanization of all human beings—ideals that appreciate difference and discredit the stereotyping, dehumanization, and brutalizing of all peoples. In light of the presence of racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia in America, sculpting a hermeneutic for interpreting and appropriating texts in the HB that deal with "Otherness," and for recognizing select socioeconomic problems that accompany *Otherness*, therefore, is a project with promise and with far reaching tentacles, not just for Black Americans, who are Christians, but for Americans of all faith communities.

---

<sup>1</sup> See David Masci, *5 facts about the religious lives of African Americans* <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/02/07/5-facts-about-the-religious-lives-of-african-americans/> last accessed August 4, 2018.

<sup>2</sup>The foundations of Blacks in America aligning themselves with Christianity reach back into the nineteenth century. Academicians who study the African-American religious experience, too, cite evidence and formulate arguments that indicate Islam was extant amongst those human beings taken from the West coast of sub-Saharan Africa and transported to America during the West Atlantic slave trade. For a helpful treatment on the presence of Islam amongst enslaved Africans in America, please see, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook*, edited by Allen D. Austin, it is suggested that ten percent of the number of Africans who were transported and enslaved in America were Muslim. The story of *Omar ibn Said* warrants attention at this point.

## COURSE FORMAT

*REL 465: The “Other” in the Hebrew Bible and in African American Social Ethics* contains four major blocks of instruction. The first section discusses the role sacred text in moral decision-making. The second section elucidates the notion of “the Other” in the collections of law in the HB. The third explores “Otherness” on the current scene, e.g., Blacks, Jews, and Muslims. The fourth part of the class sculpts frameworks for appropriating texts and terms in the legal corpora in the HB in a manner that debunks racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia.

Most of our interaction will occur in the traditional classroom setting. Part of our class, however, will occur in cyberspace. This class, too, will use a range of approaches to cover the material in this class. Among these pedagogical strategies should be included lectures, student presentations, recorded audio lectures, interactive lectures, chats, and Power Point Presentations. If a digital piece is needed for the week, these items will be posted no later than Wednesday of the week before you are scheduled to review it.

Here is my advice for how to position yourself to do well in *REL 465: The “Other” in the Hebrew Bible and in African American Social Ethics*: (a) complete all **Required Readings**, not Recommended Readings, prior to beginning the week’s unit; (b) listen to any recorded lectures and review the accompanying power point presentations prior to beginning the week’s unit; (c) prior to beginning the week’s unit, review your notes from the readings, lectures, and power point presentations; (d) bring your modern committee translation of the Bible and Quran to class with you; (e) do all study questions, review questions, and other short assignments; and (f) upload/submit your assignments via Blackboard. I, too, recommend that you set aside at least six hours per week to listen or view any recorded lecture or video, or to complete the required readings and assignments.

## COURSE OUTCOMES

*REL 465: The “Other” in the Hebrew Bible and in African American Social Ethics* will do the following:

- (a) introduce key theological ideas associated with the use of scripture in moral philosophizing;
- (b) examine texts and terms that deal with “Otherness” in the legal corpora in the HB;
- (c) cast light on hatreds and ideologies that have targeted the “Other” in America, e.g., racism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia;
- (d) critique the influence of mainstream print and social media on perceptions of “the “Other, i.e., Blacks, Jews, and Muslims in American societies;

## COURSE OUTCOME INDICATORS

For successful completion of *REL 465: The “Other” in the Hebrew Bible and in African American Social Ethics*, the student must be able to do the following:

- (a) describe three methodological issues associated with using the HB in moral decision-making;
- (b) contrast minimally two accounts of the terms and concepts in the laws in the HB that denote “the Other;”
- (c) contrast two ideological features of the major legal corpora in the HB and two features of their socioeconomic milieux;
- (d) evaluate minimally three ideologies, stereotypes, or beliefs that informs racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia;
- (e) evaluate minimally two ways mainstream print or television media depict or portray Blacks, Jews, and Muslims (since 9/11/01)

## COURSE EVALUATION

Grades will be based on two (2) Exams; (12) Reflection papers on racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia (1.5 page, single space reflection) in American society; (7) Blogs: 4 -150 word Blogs and 4-150 Word Response to Blogs on racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia in recent events; and (1) Digital Project on racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia in the Black community. Student have one day to make up a missed exam, submit a late paper, or post a Blog without penalty. After the second day of lateness, grades will be lowered one letter grade per day of lateness. After the one-day grace period, students have three days to complete or submit a missed assignment. Grades will be determined by the following system:

|    |                   |             |          |                  |
|----|-------------------|-------------|----------|------------------|
| a. | Midterm Exam      | 20%         | A/94-100 | A- /90-93        |
| b. | Reflection Papers | 25%         | B+/87-89 | B/83-86 B-/80-82 |
| c. | Final Exam        | 20%         | C+/77-79 | C/73-76 C-/70-72 |
| d. | Digital Project   | 20%         | D+/67-69 | D/63-66 D-/60-62 |
| e. | Blogs (7)         | <u>15%</u>  | F/59-    |                  |
|    | <b>TOTAL</b>      | <b>100%</b> |          |                  |

## COURSE TEXTBOOKS

A modern committee translation of the Bible, i.e., NRSV, RSV, NEB, The Jerusalem Bible, or Tanakh (a translation of the HB by the Jewish Publication Society).

Allport, Gordon. *The Nature of Prejudice*. New York: Basic Books, 1979.

Bennett, Harold. *Injustice Made Legal*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.

Franklin, Robert. *Crises in the Village*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Kumar, Deepa. *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*. 9th Edition. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012.

Lowery, Wesley. *The Can't Kill Us All*. UK: Penguin Press, 2017.

Smedley, Audrey, and Brain Smedley. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Routledge, Oxford, UK, 2011.

*State of Black America 2018*-National Urban League Report

Wistrich, Robert . *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred*. New York: Schocken, 1991 .

[www.c-span.org/video/?316040-1/after-words-peter-gottschalk](http://www.c-span.org/video/?316040-1/after-words-peter-gottschalk)

<http://halalinthefamily.tv/>

<https://www.vox.com/2014/10/8/6918485/the-overt-islamophobia-on-american-tv-news-is-out-of-control>

*Additional Readings will come from "The Root" Magazine. Please download the "Blavity" App so you can have quick access to "The Root" and other online magazines that focus on life in Black America.*

**SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND ASSIGNED READINGS / VIEWINGS**

| <b>Date</b>     | <b>Topic</b>   |
|-----------------|--|
|                 | <b>I. SETTING THE STAGE</b>  |
|                 | A. How might the biblical evidence inform the present discussion on “the Other” in African-American Social Ethics?   |
| <b>January</b>  | 22 <i>Law in the HB</i><br>Req. Reading: Bennett 2002, Chapter 1   |
|                 | 29 <i>The Other in the BC and DC</i><br>Req. Reading: Bennett 2002, Chapters 2-4   |
|                 | B. What does it mean to categorize a human being? What are possible ways of understanding the notions of race and/or ethnicity? Are these categories helpful or harmful? What are some of the socioeconomic issues these categories bring into play? |
| <b>February</b> | 5 <i>Black or White: Categories or What?</i><br>Req. Reading: Allport 1979, Chapters 3 & 7<br>Smedley & Smedley 2011, TBA  |
|                 | 12 <i>Hatred Towards Blacks: Educational Disparities in America</i><br>Req. Reading: <i>State of Black America 2018</i><br>Smedley & Smedley 2011, TBA<br>Franklin 2007, TBA.  |
|                 | 19 <i>Hatred Towards Blacks: The Black Male in America</i><br>Req. Reading: Smedley & Smedley 2011, TBA<br><i>Lowery 2017, TBA</i>   |
|                 | 26 <i>Hatred Towards Blacks: Economic Disparities in America</i><br>Req. Reading: <i>State of Black America 2018</i><br>Smedley & Smedley 2011, TBA  |
| <b>March</b>    | 5 <b>MID-TERM EXAM</b>   |
|                 | 12 <b>SPRING BREAK</b>   |
|                 | 19 <i>Antisemitism: The Definitional Question</i><br>Req. Reading: Wistrich 1991, p. 252-269   |
|                 | 26 <i>Tropes that Fuel Hatred</i><br>Req. Reading: Wistrich 1991, p. 3-53  |
| <b>April</b>    | 2 <i>The Apogee of Hatred towards Jews: The Holocaust</i><br>Req. Reading: Wistrich 1991, p. 54-77   |
|                 | 9 <i>Zionism</i><br>Req. Reading: Wistrich 1991, p. 240-251.   |
|                 | 16 <i>Islamophobia: The Definitional Question</i><br>Req. Reading: Kumar 2012, Chapters 1-2.   |

**SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND ASSIGNED READINGS / VIEWINGS**

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Topic</b>  |                          |
|-------------|---|--------------------------|
| <i>23</i>   | <i>Tropes that Fuel Hatred</i><br>Req. Reading: Kumar 2012, Chapter 3; TBA<br>Halal in the Family   |                          |
| <i>30</i>   | <i>The Apogee of Hatred towards Muslims</i><br>Req. Reading: Kumar 2012, Chapters 8-10.<br><i>The Gottschalk Interview Mentioned Above</i><br><i>The Overt Islamophobia Article Mentioned Above</i> |                          |
| <i>May</i>  | <i>7</i>  | <b><i>FINAL EXAM</i></b> |

### ***EEO & Disability Statement***

EEO & Disability Statement Morehouse College is an equal opportunity employer and educational institution. Students with disabilities or those who suspect they have a disability must register with the Office of Disability Services (“ODS”) in order to receive accommodations. Students currently registered with the ODS are required to present their Disability Services Accommodation Letter to faculty immediately upon receiving the accommodation. If you have any questions, contact the Office of Disability Services, 100 Sale Hall Annex, Morehouse College, 830 Westview Dr. S.W., Atlanta, GA 30314, (404) 215-2636.

### ***Statement on Academic Dishonesty***

Morehouse College students are expected to conduct themselves with the highest level of ethics and academic honesty at all times and abide by the terms set forth in the Student Handbook and Code of Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty, including, but not limited to plagiarism and cheating on examinations and assignments, are taken seriously and may result in a failing grade for the assignment or course and may be reported to the Honor and Conduct Review Board for disciplinary action.

### ***Syllabus is not a Contract***

A syllabus is not a contract between instructor and student, but rather a guide to course procedures. The instructor reserves the right to amend the syllabus when conflicts, emergencies or circumstances dictate. Students will be duly notified.

### ***Inclement Weather Policy***

In the event of inclement weather, the College will announce any closures via the emergency notification system and/or through local news outlets. Absent an official closure, students are not excused from attending class due to weather and any absences will be considered unexcused.