

Leonard Cornell McKinnis, II

Assistant Professor of African American Religions and Black Studies

Departments of Religion and African American Studies

African American Studies, MC-143

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EDUCATION

Loyola University of Chicago | Chicago, IL

Doctor of Philosophy | Constructive Theology (With Distinction)

Harvard University | Cambridge, MA

Master of Theological Studies | Constructive Theology and African American Religion

Lewis University | Romeoville, IL

Bachelor of Science | Government and History

Kingston University | London, England

International Politics

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Race and Religion

Imaginative Communities

Black Religions

Black Theology

Great Migration New Religious Movements

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ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign | Urbana, IL

Assistant Professor (Tenure Track) of Constructive Theology and African-American Religions, 2020 -
Joint Appointment Religion and African American Studies

Saint Louis University | Saint Louis, MO

Assistant Professor (Tenure Track) of Constructive Theology and African-American Religion, 2017-
2020

Primary Appointment Theological Studies; Secondary Appointment, African American Studies

Saint Louis University | Saint Louis, MO

University Lecturer (Non-Tenure Track), Theological Studies, 2015 – 2017

DePaul University | Chicago, IL

Lecturer of Religious Studies (adjunct), 2012 - 2015

Loyola University of Chicago | Chicago, IL

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Loyola University Chicago, 2010-
2012

COURSES

Undergraduate

- Religion, Race, and Resistance
- Race and Religion in America: The Search for Identity During the Great Migration
- Religion and Social Change in Black America: Ethics and Theologies of Resistance
- The African-American Religious Experience
- Black Intellectual Traditions: Suffering and Evil in Black Religion
- Black and Womanist Theologies: An Introduction
- Seeking God: Augustine, Clairvaux, Weil, and Cone
- Social Justice
- History of Christian Thought to 1500
- History of Christian Thought Since 1500
- Introduction to Liberation Theologies
- The Black Experience in America
- Theories and Methods in African American Studies

Graduate

- Race, Body, and Being in the Study of Black Religious Thought (PhD Seminar)
- Black Theology and its Critics (PhD seminar)
- Social Conflict in America: Black Theology and the Politics of Meaning
- American Prophet: Theological and Ethical Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.

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PUBLICATIONS

Monographs

- *Divine Blackness: Performative Imagination and the Formation of Identity in Black Religion* (forthcoming)
- *Blackontology: On Mysticism and the Ground of Being in Black Theology* (in progress)

Peer-Reviewed Articles

- “Race, Religion, Imagination: Introducing the Black Copts,” (revise and resubmit, *Nova Religio*)
- “Something Within: The Spirit in the Religion of the Slaves,” (under review)
- “From Christ to Black Jesus: Black Theology’s Christological move as operative in the Black Coptic Church,” *Black Theology: An International Journal*, vol. 14, No. 3, 2016. (Autumn 2016).

Online

- “From Selma to St. Louis: 50 Years Since the Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” with Julie Rubio and Rachel Lindsey, Forthcoming, *Syndicate*, April 2018.
- “Liberating the Incarnation of the Word: Michael Brown, Ferguson, and the Problem of the Normative Gaze,” *Syndicate* July/August 2014: 124-129, Print.

Book reviews

- Review of *The Urban Church Imagined: Religion, Race, and Authenticity in the City*, by Jessica M. Barron and Rhys H. Williams, in *Journal of Religion*,

In progress

- “King Peter Banks: The Other Black God of the Metropolis”
- “Going Beyond: Transcendence and the Possibility of Existence Otherwise in the Religion of the Slaves”

TALKS

Invited (Academic)

- Blakontology: On Mysticism and Black Being, Link Auditorium, St. Louis, February, 2020
- Racialized Symbols in the American Imagination, Loyola Academy, St. Louis, MO, 2018
- Divine Images: Race and Religion in the American Imagination, St. Francis Xavier College Church, Saint Louis University, November, 2018
- Research Methods in African-American Theological Studies, Saint Louis University, October 2017
- Beyond the Categorical: Constructing an Ontology of the Person in Black Theology, Saint Louis University, African American Studies, February 2016
- Theological Praxis in an Age of Contested Bodies: Martin, Brown, Garner, and the Echoes of Strange Fruit, Theological Convocation, Wesleyan College, Macon, GA, February 2015
- Toward a Freeing Pneumatology: Karl Rahner’s Theological Anthropology in Black Theology, invited lecturer, Lewis University, February 2011
- A Black God in the Metropolis: Revisiting Arthur Fausett *Black Gods*, Religion Convivium, DePaul University, August, 2010
- The Christology of Chalcedon in Contextual Theology, Loyola University Chicago, invited lecturer in Theology 318, March 2010

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- Reading Irenaeus as a Liberationist, Department of Religion Faculty Colloquium, DePaul University, March 2010
- History and Development of Black Theology, Loyola University of Chicago, March 2008
- Humiliating Deaths: The Relationship between the Crucifixion and the Lynched Black Bodies – A review of James Cone, Lewis University, Romeoville, IL, February 2007
- Jesus and the Poor: Reading the Infancy Narratives from the Underside, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Indianapolis, IN, December 2006
- Panelist, Broadening the Vision: The Challenges of Black and Womanist Theologies, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL, November 2006
- Panelist, Community, Courage, and, Love: Lecture and Panel with Dr. Cornel West and Dr. Julius Bailey, Main Street Church of God, Decatur, IL, April 2005

Conference Participation

- “I told Jesus it would be alright if he Changed My Name: Performative Imagination and Identity Construction in Black Coptic Religion,” American Academy of Religion, Afro-American Religious History and New Religion Movements Units, Virtual, November 2020
- Respondent, “White Supremacy, Race, and New Religious Movements,” American Academy of Religion, Afro-American Religious History and New Religion Movements Units, Virtual, November, 2020
- What is the Black in Black Religion?, Society for the Study of Black Religion, Atlanta, March 2020
- Presider, Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr. Unit, American Academy of Religion, San Diego, CA, 2019
- “World Without End? Cosmology and Existential Absurdity in *Black Theology and Black Power*, Black Theology Unit,” American Academy of Religion, San Diego, CA, November, 2019
- What has Ethiopia to do with Chicago? Performative Imagination and *Otherwise* in Black Religious Spaces, Lived Religion symposium, Saint Louis University, October, 2019
- Hail to the Queens of Ethiopia: Religion and the Shaping of Identity in the Black Coptic Church, New Religious Movements Unit, American Academy of Religion, Denver CO, November, 2018
- Minority Scholars in Religion and Theology, Graduate Student Conference, paper session moderator, Covenant Seminary St. Louis, March, 2018
- Re-claiming Heritage: Religion and the Politics of Identity in the Black Coptic Church, Oxford University Religious Studies Symposium, Oxford, July 2018
- “Personhood, Conscience, and the Law: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Theological Ethical of Resistance in the Age of ’45,” Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr., American Academy of Religion, Boston, 2017
- “The Black Coptic Church of Chicago: Advancing Arthur Fausett’s *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, Afro-American Religion Section, American Academy of Religion, Chicago 2012
- “Jesus on the Margins: Examining the Paradox of Liberation in light of Human Sexuality in the Black Church,” Student Theological Conference, Garrett Evangelical Seminary, April 2010
- Deconstructing Diversity: Examining the Ideal of the Post-Racial Society, Lewis University, November 2009

Conferences Organized

- Convener, Minority Scholars in Religion and Theology, Graduate Student Conference, Saint Louis University, March, 2019

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- From Selma to St. Louis: Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr. 50 Years Later, St. Louis University, April, 2018
Panelists and Speakers: Drs. Dwight Hopkins, M. Shawn Copleand, J. Kameron Carter, Kelly Brown Douglas, Jeffrey McCune
- Co-sponsor, Graduate Students of Color in the Study of Religion and Theology, Saint Louis, March, 2018
- Race, Religion, and Justice: Religion and Social Change in Black America, DePaul University, 10 November 2010
Panelists: Father Michael Pflieger (St. Sabina, Chicago), Minister Ishmael Muhammad (Assistant Minister, Nation of Islam), and Royal Priest Meshach Gardiner (Spiritual Leader, Black Coptic Church)

Invited (Religious Communities)

- “African American Religious History,” Central Baptist Church, St. Louis, MO, September 2018
- “The Gospel of Love and Social Engagement,” Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Indianapolis, IN, October 2017
- “The Black Coptic Church: From Atlanta to Chicago,” Coptic Nation Temple, Chicago, IL, July, 2017
- “Introduction to Black Liberation Theology,” St. Johns United Church of Christ, St. Louis, February, 2017
- “Symbol and Iconography in the Black Coptic Church,” Coptic Church of Faith, Chicago, IL, November, 2016
- “Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Social Gospel,” St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, Mobile, AL, March, 2016
- “African American Religion and Slavery,” Greater Holy Temple Church of God in Christ, Chicago, IL, February, 2016
- “Black Youth Crisis” (panelist), Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Indianapolis, IN, October, 2015

GRANTS AND AWARDS

- Louisville Institute Sabbatical Grant for Researchers, Academic Year 2020-2021, \$40,000
- Saint Louis University, Co-Curricular Grant, \$500
- Saint Louis University Faculty Research Leave, Fall 2019
- Saint Louis University Faculty Mellon Award, \$4,750 | 2018
- Saint Louis University bicentennial grant for MLK Symposium, \$20,000 | 2018
- Summer Research Award, Saint Louis University, \$10,755.00 | 2017
- Diversifying Faculty in Illinois Colleges and Universities Fellowship (DFI) | 2006-2010
Full tuition and \$12,000 annual stipend
- Harvard Divinity School Tuition Fellowship | 2003-2005
- Chicago Humanities Fellowship | 2000-2001
- Lewis University LaSallian Scholarship | 1999-2003

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SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION

- Chair, Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr. Unit, American Academy of Religion 2020 -
- Executive Committee, Society for the Study of Black Religion, 2019 -
- Steering Committee, Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr. unit, American Academy of Religion, 2017 - 2020

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

University Committees

- College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Council (Undergraduate Curriculum sub-committee), 2017-2019

Department Committees

- Graduate Studies Committee, University of Illinois, Department of Religion, 2020 -
- Religion and Complex Issues Committee, Saint Louis University, 2017 -
- Undergraduate Studies Committee, Saint Louis University, 2016 –2017
- Committee on Hiring for Diversity, Saint Louis University, 2016-2018

PhD Students

- David Justice, 2018 – (director)
- Deepan Rajarnatam, Committee member

M.A. Thesis Committees

- David Justice, 2018 (director); Kevin Seahy, 2018

Comprehensive Exams Committees

- Creighton Coleman (M.A.), 2017

Senior Thesis Advisor (B.A.)

- Thomas Neiers, “Slavery, the Bible, and Religion”
- Paige Pearson, “Race and Theology: A Contextual Investigation of Theological Activism in St. Louis,” 2018
- Maria Yamnitz, “Method in Liberation Theology,” 2017
- Liz Vestal, “What’s the Intention? The Praxis of Womanist Theology in the Catholic Community at Saint Louis University,” 2016
- Andrew Sullivan, “Economics, Social Justice, and Public Choice,” 2016
- Caroline Belden, “Denying Denial, “Towards a Theology of White Liberation,” 2016

Campus Sponsored Panels/Lectures

- Racial and Social Progress since Occupy SLU, moderator, October, 2018
- University Mission and Identity, panelist, New Faculty Orientation, August, 2018
- Black and Free: The Mystical, February, 2018
- Free Speech, Academic Freedom: A Theological Response, February, 2018
- Race and Religion, panelist, Saint Louis University, February, 2018

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- Work/Life Balance in the Academy, Saint Louis University, October, 2017
- Incoming Student Panel, Saint Louis University, September, 2017
- The intersection of Faith and Vocation, Agape Latte, Saint Louis University, April 2017
- The Election of Donald Trump and its Theological Implications on Black America, keynote speaker, Black Student Alliance Black History Month, February, 2017
- Bad Theology: Queer Struggles for Identity and Recognition in Religious Communities, Saint Louis University, November, 2016
- Religious Diversity in America and Abroad, panel, Saint Louis University, April 2016
- Intersection of Faith, Race and Justice: Black Theology and the Black Lives Matter Movement, Free to [be] panel, Saint Louis University, March 2016
- Heart and Head: The Impact of Jesuit Heritage on Scholarship, Saint Louis University, February, 2016
- My Brother's Keeper: A Dialogue on the Progress of President Obama Black Male Initiative, Saint Louis University, October 2015

Student Organization Advisor

- LUCHA: Latinx Student Organization, Saint Louis University, 2016 –

PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING

Loyola University Chicago

Certificate in Theological Pedagogy | 2008

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- Society for the Study of Black Religion, 2018 -
- American Academy of Religion, 2009 -

NON-ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- **National Policy Director** | 2011 - 15
Center for Labor and Community Research
- **Mayoral Fellow** (crime prevention policies) | 2005 - 07
City of Chicago, Office of the Mayor (Richard M. Daley)
- **Secretary of Labor Senior Policy Fellow** | 2004 – 05
United States Department of Labor, Office of the Secretary of Labor, Elaine Chao
- **White House Intern** | 2002 -
03 Executive Office of the
President, George W. Bush
Administration

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RESEARCH LANGUAGES

French (reading and speaking proficiency)

German (reading)

REFERENCES

Marla Frederick, PhD

Asa Griggs Professor of Religion and Culture

Emory University

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Dwight N. Hopkins, PhD

Alexander Campbell Professor of Theology

The University of Chicago Divinity School

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