

Leonard Cornell McKinnis, II

Assistant Professor of Religion 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 | Theological and Religious Studies (With Distinction)

Harvard University | Cambridge, MA

Master of Theological Studies | Theology and African American Religion

Lewis University | Romeoville, IL

Bachelor of Science | Government and History

Kingston University | London, England

International Politics (*Study Abroad*)

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Black Religions
- Race and Religion
- Religion and Ethnography
- Black theology
- Black Studies
- Ontology
- Great Migration New Religious Movements

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ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign | Urbana, IL

Assistant Professor (Tenure Stream), Religion and African American Studies 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

Post-Doctoral Teaching Fellowship, Loyola University Chicago,
2011-2012

PUBLICATIONS

Monograph

- *Divine Blackness: Race, Religion, and Imagination among Black Coptic Believers*, NYU Press, “Race, Religion, and Ethnicity” series, Winter 2022 (under publication contract, in preparation for final submission)
- “All God’s Children Got a Robe: Sunday’s Best and the Black Body as a Site of Constructing Racial Identity,” in George Pati and Yudit Greenberg, *Handbook on Religion and the Body* (Routledge, forthcoming)

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: Richard Kent Evans, *Move: An American Religion, Sociology of Religion*, Volume 82, Issue 3, Autumn 2021, Pages 385–386, 2021.
- Review: J. M. Barron and R. H. Williams' *The Urban Church Imagined: Religion, Race, and Authenticity in the City*, *Journal of Religion*, 100(2), 268-269, 2020.

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”

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
- 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 Black Religious Thought (Graduate 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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TALKS

Invited (Academic)

- Black Religious Imaginations in Chicago, Northwestern University, American Studies and African American Studies, February, 2022.
- “Blackness in the Afterlife: Earthquakes, Black Religion(s), and the Search for Identity,” Humbert Lecture, Eureka College, November, 2021.
- Blakcontology: 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.
- 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,

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Main Street Church of God, Decatur, IL, April 2005.

Conference Participation

- “All God’s Children Got a Robe: The Black Body as a Site of Resistance and Identity Construction,” American Academy of Religion, Body and Religion Unit, San Antonio, 2022 (virtual).
- “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, November 2020, (virtual).
- 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 2021 (virtual).
- 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,

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November 2009.

Conferences Organized

- Co-convener, Ways of Hearing: Sound and Religion, Saint Louis University, October 2021.
- Convener, Minority Scholars in Religion and Theology, Graduate Student Conference, Saint Louis University, March, 2019.
- 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 Pfleger (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

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GRANTS AND AWARDS

- American Academy of Religion Individual Researchers Grant, \$5,500, 2021
- Louisville Institute Sabbatical Grant for Researchers, Calendar Year 2021, \$40,000
- Co-Curricular Grant, Saint Louis University, \$500
- Faculty Research Leave, Saint Louis University, Fall 2019
- Faculty Mellon Award, Saint Louis University, \$5,000 | 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

SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION

- Committee Member, Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession, American Academy of Religion, 2022-2025.
- Committee member, Body and Religion Unit, American Academy of Religion, 2022-Present.
- Chair, Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr. Unit, American Academy of Religion 2020 – Present.
- Executive Committee, Society for the Study of Black Religion, 2019 – Present.
- Steering Committee, Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr. unit, American Academy of Religion, 2017 – 2020.

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

University Committees

- Fulbright Internal Committee, University of Illinois, 2022.

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

Department Committees

- Search Committee, Black Politics and Public Policy, African American Studies, University of Illinois, Spring, 2022.
- Graduate Studies Committee, University of Illinois, Department of Religion, 2020 – Present.
- Religion and Complex Issues Committee, Saint Louis University, 2017 – 2020.
- 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, 2018-Present, 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.)

- Jack Popovich, Department of Religion, University of Illinois
- 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

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- 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.
- 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 Blake 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

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Center for Labor and Community Research

- **Mayoral Fellow** | 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 Presidential Intern** | 2002 – 2003
Office of the President of the United States
Washington, DC

RESEARCH LANGUAGES

French (reading)

German (reading)

REFERENCES

Marla Frederick, PhD
Asa Griggs Professor of Religion and Culture
Emory University
Marla.frederick@emory.edu

J. Kamer Carter, PhD
Professor, Religious Studies
Indiana University
jkcarter@indiana.edu

Peter Paris, PhD
Elmer G. Homrighausen Professor, Emeritus
Princeton Theological Seminary
Series Editor, *Race, Religion, Ethnicity*, NYU Press

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Peter.paris@ptsem.edu