

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

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

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, Spring 2023 (forthcoming)

Edited Volumes:

- “Society and Religion,” in *Bloomsbury Religion in North America* digital series (Under Contract)

Book Chapters

- “All God’s Children Got a Robe: Sunday’s Best and the Black Body as a Site of Racial Identity,” in George Pati and Yudit Greenberg, *Handbook on Religion and the Body* (Routledge, forthcoming)

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

- “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.

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
- Black Theology and its Critics
- 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.
- Blackontology: 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

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

CONFERENCE TALKS

- “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.

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- “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

- Co-convenor, 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 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.

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- “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

- Wabash Center, Pre-tenure Mentorship Grant, with Herbert Marbury (Vanderbilt Divinity School), Michele Watkins (University of San Diego), Nyasha Junior (Temple University)
- Seed Grant, Humanities Without Walls, with Alexia Williams, University of Illinois, \$3,000
- Intercultural Competency Course Revision Grant, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, School of Literature, Culture, and Linguistics , \$1,500
- 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

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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.
- Co-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

- Commencement Speaker, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, School of Literature, Culture, and Linguistics, 2022
- Fulbright Internal Committee, University of Illinois, 2022.
- College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Council (Undergraduate Curriculum sub-committee), Saint Louis University, 2017-2019

Department Committees

- Search Committee, Islam, Department of Religion, University of Illinois, 2022
- 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)

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M.A. Thesis Committees

- David Justice, 2018 (director)
- Kevin Seahy, 2018 (committee member)

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
- 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.

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- **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
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)

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REFERENCES

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

J. Kameron 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
Peter.paris@ptsem.edu