Conversations on Black Religion in the American Diaspora

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On April 3-5, 2008, the Yale University Divinity School will host a major interdisciplinary conference on Black religion in the American Diaspora with a focus on Black religious life in the United States. Rather than the traditional format of academic papers, the conference will focus on creating conversations among scholars, clergy, laity, and students. The focus is the Middle Passage as a historical event and a framework to think through the current ways in which Black religion is studied, taught, and lived in contemporary life.

One goal of these conversations is to be a resource for the ongoing study of Black religion in the United States as it relates to religious life in the U.S. in general and Black religion globally. A second goal is that the conference will be a foundation for future networking and strategizing among the participants. The underlying assumption of the conference is that it is increasingly imperative that the academy engages religion in the public realm -- both in the United States and in international contexts. In an increasingly polarized world and a larger academic environment that can often be hostile to things religious, scholars of religion cannot absent themselves from the public conversations we now have about religion. Many shudder at the simplistic and cartoonish characterizations we see and hear about Black religions that are complex and nuanced.

By engaging in an interdisciplinary conversation that includes anthropologists, biblical scholars, ethicists, historians, lawyers, musicians, poets, social scientists, and theologians, this historic conference will be one of the largest gatherings of scholars of Black religion ever held. It features 8 panels of nearly 30 senior and junior scholars. Among the scholars who will participate are Katie Geneva Cannon, M. Shawn Copeland, Kelly Brown Douglas, Robert Franklin, Eddie Glaude, Dwight Hopkins, William McClain, Peter Paris, Albert Raboteau,
Linda Thomas, Renita Weems, and Cornel West. There will be two evening sessions that will feature drama and music.

The conference is sponsored by Yale Divinity School, the Institute of Sacred Music, the Fund for Theological Education, the Yale Religious Studies Department, the Yale African American Studies Department, the Yale Women, Gender, and Sexuality Program, and the New England-Maritime Region of the American Academy of Religion. The conference is free and open to the public.