

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

- 2011** **Loyola University of Chicago** | Chicago, IL
Doctor of Philosophy | Theological and Religious Studies (With Distinction)
- 2005** **Harvard University** | Cambridge, MA
Master of Theological Studies | Theology and African American Religion
- 2003** **Lewis University** | Romeoville, IL
Bachelor of Science | Government and History
- Kingston University** | London, England
International Politics (*Study Abroad*)

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- 2020 -** **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign** | Urbana, IL
Assistant Professor (*Tenure Stream*)
Religion and African American Studies
Joint Appointment Religion and African American Studies
- 2023** **Emory University, Candler School of Theology**
Sankofa Scholar, (*January Term*)
- 2017-2020** **Saint Louis University** | Saint Louis, MO
Assistant Professor (*Tenure Track*)
Constructive Theology and African American Religion
- 2015-2017** **Saint Louis University** | Saint Louis, MO
Lecturer (*Non-Tenure Track*), Theological Studies
- 2012-2015** **DePaul University** | Chicago, IL
Lecturer of Religious Studies (Post-doc)

PUBLICATIONS

Books

- *The Black Coptic Church: Race and Imagination in a New Religion*, NYU Press, July 2023. (Race, Religion, and Ethnicity Series.)
 - Review: David Ngong, *Reading Religion*, November 2024.
 - Review: Vance D. Keys, *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, October, 2024.
- *Everyday Muslim: Material Spirituality in the Nation of Islam* (Book proposal under review)

Articles

- “Metaphors of Darkness: Material Religion and the Divinization of Black Flesh,” *Religion*, forthcoming, 2025.
- “Disruption: Anthony Pinn, Disbelief, and the Expansion of Black Religions,” (accepted for publication, *Secular Studies*, 2025)
- “Beyond the Absurd: Black Religion, Martin Luther King, and Resistance in North America,” in *Bloomsbury Religion in North America*, Bloomsbury Academic (accepted for publication, 2025)
- “Allah Has Truly Blessed Me: Locating Spirituality among Believers in the Nation of Islam,” (accepted for publication, *Nova Religio*, 2024)
- “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).
- “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:
- Review: Stephen Finley, *In & Out of this World: Material and Extraterrestrial Bodies in the Nation of Islam*, *African American Review*, Volume 56.3, Fall 2023, Pages 244-245.
- 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.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

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

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

- Wabash Center, African Diasporic Teaching Cohort, 2025
- Crossroads Fellow, Princeton University Center for Culture Society and Religion, “The Messengers Residence: A Virtual tour of the Elijah Muhammad House,” 2024-2025
- Lived Religion in the Digital Age, “Where’s Religion”, Luce Award, housed at Saint Louis University, 2023
- Department of African American Studies Faculty Research Award, University of Illinois, 2023
- OpEd Public Voices Fellowship, University of Illinois, 2022-2023
- Office of the Provost Pre-tenure workshop award, 2023
- Wabash Center, Pre-tenure Mentoring Grant, with Professors Herbert Marbury (Vanderbilt Divinity School), Michele Watkins (University of San Diego), Nyasha Junior (Temple University)
- Seed Grant, Humanities Without Walls, with Professor Alexia Williams, University of Illinois, 2022
- Intercultural Competency Course Revision Grant, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, School of Literature, Culture, and Linguistics | 2022
- Louisville Institute Sabbatical Grant for Researchers, Calendar Year 2021
- American Academy of Religion Individual Researchers Grant | 2021
- Co-Curricular Grant, Saint Louis University | 2020
- Faculty Research Leave, Saint Louis University | Fall 2019
- Faculty Mellon Award, Saint Louis University| 2018

- Saint Louis University bicentennial grant for MLK Symposium | 2018
- Summer Research Award, Saint Louis University | 2017
- Diversifying Faculty in Illinois Colleges and Universities Fellowship (DFI) | 2006-2010
Full tuition and annual stipend
- Harvard Divinity School Tuition Fellowship | 2003-2005
- Chicago Humanities Fellowship | 2000-2001

COURSES

Undergraduate

- Black and Womanist Theologies: An Introduction
- Religions of the Black Diaspora
- Slavery and Religion in the African American Experience
- 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
- Seeking God: Augustine, Clairvaux, Weil, and Cone
- Black Diasporic Religions
- History of Christian Thought to 1500
- History of Christian Thought Since 1500
- Introduction to Liberation Theologies

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 Religion, Displacement, and the Search for Identity in the Nation of Islam, University of Maryland, March 2024.
- Imagining and Performing Blackness in the Nation of Islam, Northern Illinois University, February, 2024.
- Lived Religion and the Ethnographic Framing in *Between Sundays*, Yale University, January 2024.
- Revolt: The Rebel Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, MLK Invited Lecture, January 2024.
- Panelists, “The Black Church in America,” sponsored by Illinois Public Radio, Champaign, IL, December 2023
- *Otherwise* Blackness: Performance and Imagination among Black Coptic Believers, Mississippi State University, April 2023.
- Ethiopianism in Chicago: Black Religion(s) and the Great Migration, University of Rochester, April, 2023.
- 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.

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

Conference Presentations

- Panelist, “Author Meets Critic,” *Black Transhuman Liberation Theology: Technology and Spirituality*, American Academy of Religion, Body and Religion Unity, Denver, 2022.
- “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, 2021 (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

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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

- 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 Pfleger (St. Sabina, Chicago), Minister Ishmael Muhammad (Assistant Minister, Nation of Islam), and Royal Priest Meshach Gardiner (Spiritual Leader, Black Coptic Church)

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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
- Chicago Humanities Fellowship | 2000-2001

Media Appearances

- Guest appearance and interview, “Critical Race Theory and Public Education,” WCIA, Champaign, IL, February 2023.
- Panelists, “The Black Church in America,” sponsored by Illinois Public Radio, Champaign, IL, December 2023.
- Guest appearance, “The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” Wisconsin Public Radio, January, 2024.
- Panelist, Gospel Music and the Black Church, sponsored by Illinois Public Radio, February, 2024.

SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION

- Executive Director, Society for the Study of Black Religion, 2023 – 2024
- Status Committee Member, Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession,

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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.
- Manuscript reviewer: The Ohio State University Press, Georgetown University Press, *Religions, Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

- Faculty Board, University of Illinois Press, 2024 – Present
- 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 Service

- Curriculum Development Committee, 2024 – Present
- Member, Graduate Studies Committee, Department of Religion, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2024 – Present
- Member, Intellectual Activities Committee, Department of African American Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2024 – Present
- Chair, Office Manager Search, Department of African American Studies, 2023 – 2024
- Chair, Intellectual Activities Committee, Department of African American Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2022 – 2024
- Undergraduate Advisor, Department of African American Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2022 -
- Search Committee, Black Politics and Public Policy, African American Studies, University of Illinois, Spring, 2022.

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- 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

- Calandra Warren, 2023 – Present (Field Exams reviewer, dissertation committee)
- David Justice, 2018 – 2023 (current, Visiting Assistant Professor, Baylor University)
- Deepan Rajarnatam, 2018-2024 (committee member)

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

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- 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.
- 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 -

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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
Dean, Harvard Divinity School (Jan. 2024)
Marla.frederick@emory.edu

J. Kamer Carter, PhD
Professor, Religious Studies
University of California, Irvine
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