

# Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium

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Volume 8

Article 9

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12-1-2014

## **Review – *Introducing African American Religion*, by Anthony B. Pinn**

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### **Recommended Citation**

Mosely, LaReine-Marie (2014) "Review – *Introducing African American Religion*, by Anthony B. Pinn," *Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*: Vol. 8, Article 9.  
Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/jbcts/vol8/iss1/9>

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*Introducing African American Religion*. Anthony B. Pinn. New York: Routledge, 2013. 276. \$39.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-415-69401.

*Introducing African American Religion*, by prolific religious studies scholar, Anthony B. Pinn is a welcome find. This textbook is part of Routledge's World Religions Series, and it comes complete with illustrations, summary points embedded within the text, summary questions and a bibliography at the end of each chapter, discussion questions, a glossary, and chronology. At the end of the text Pinn also provides websites, movies, music, and YouTube video links all pointing to an engaging multiplatform approach to African American Religion in all its diversity.

IAAR is divided into three parts. I. "The nature, origins, and historical overview of African American religion;" II. "Major themes in African American religions;" and III. "Issues and concerns in contemporary African American religion." (v-vi) The first two parts are adequately broad and engage Islam, African traditional religions, Judaism, and secular humanism, in addition to Christianity. An important and necessary third part provides sustained attention to sex and sexuality, hip hop and religion, and the new "nones," those who do not claim a particular religious tradition or community.

This book works because of Pinn's expansive definition of African American religion as "the effort to make life meaningful and to do so in response to the questions we ask about our existence and the world in which we live" (13). While some might be more inclined to use Pinn's definition to speak about spirituality, he is curiously enough content to include humanism under the category of African American religion. A leitmotif that runs through this book is the importance of underrepresented groups, such as humanists. Roman Catholics and other groups benefit from Pinn's attention.

IAAR is a user friendly book that will appeal to visual learners. This characteristic is particularly necessary since African American religion is best explained within its historical context. Pinn writes a narrative that is clear and straight forward. Additionally, his list of books for further reading at the

end of each chapter includes important classic texts that could further enhance the main themes addressed in the chapters.

While Pinn is at pains to identify evidence of the presence of humanism in African American history, this is not always clear prior to the twentieth century. While some work songs and the blues sung during slavery may emphasize human agency or question the action of God, these themes are not mutually exclusive of belief in God or other divinities.

In the chapter on the twentieth century, Pinn very effectively mentions "humanist sensibilities" evident in the literature of Harlem Renaissance authors such as Richard Wright, and later authors such as Lorraine Hansberry, and Alice Walker (94). He also points to the presence of humanists within the Civil Rights Movement. Later in the text, current and recent religious realities are treated, such as, Jeremiah Wright, the so-called "prosperity gospel," and the different forms of liberation theology that are a part of African American religion.

In the concluding chapter on the new nones, Pinn addresses the importance of the inclusion of atheists in a book on African American religion. While acknowledging the challenge of some to place non-theists under the moniker of religion, Pinn identifies four reasons why the inclusion of nones is important to give a thick description of the African American religious landscape. 1) Religion, whether one is suspicious about it or opts out of being connected with it is important to the self-identity of nones. 2) The growth in African American nones signals changes in the religious experience of African Americans. 3) By considering the existence of nones, all are able to give consideration to other paths to lifelong meaning making. 4) Despite strong differences between theists and non-theists, many dimensions of their lives are intertwined as both groups are about the work of finding and sustaining meaning in life (236).

I would recommend *Introducing African American Religion* as a text that is inclusive of effective pedagogical approaches. Pinn accomplishes quite a bit in the 276 pages of the text and prompts his readers to be attentive to the changing landscape of African American religions.

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