



Thinking About Religion: Langston Hughes and a Literary Approach to the Study of African American Religious History

Wednesday, March 4

4:00PM – 5:30PM

Royce 306

African American religious history has largely been written from the perspective of believers and belief. But what about the religious perspectives of skeptics, the doubtful, and unbelievers? What value can be gained from explorations of their views? Wallace Best answers these questions with a historical-literary analysis of the work of Harlem Renaissance writer, Langston Hughes. Hughes's work has served, often unrecognized, as an alternative source of spiritual authority and a viable historical account of black religion. He wrote as much about religion as he did any other topic. Hughes was an astute thinker about religion, and his artistic production cannot be fully known apart from an examination of his thoughts on God, the church, and matters of ultimate meaning.



Wallace Best is Professor of Religion and African American Studies and Faculty Affiliate of History at Princeton University. He earned a PhD in United States History from Northwestern University and an MA in Church History and Theological Studies from Wheaton College (Illinois). The focus of his research and teaching merge at the crucial intersections of American religion, African American religious history, urban religion, cultural studies, and gender and sexuality studies. With attention given to the lived experiences of religion in urban contexts, he employs various historical and literary methodologies to elucidate the ways religious discourses, practices, movements, and institutions shape American society in general and African American life in particular. He is the author of *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* and *Langston's Salvation: American Religion and the Bard of Harlem*. He has also published in *Religion and American Culture*, *Religion and Politics*, *Fides Et Historia*, *U.S. Catholic Historian*, *Callaloo*, *The Huffington Post*, *Reuters*, and *The Washington Post*. He has held fellowships at the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University and the W. E. B. Du Bois Research Institute at Harvard University. At Princeton he serves on the Executive Councils of the Center for the Study of Religion and Gender and Sexuality Studies.