

Albert G. Miller who is affectionately known as "A.G." is Associate Professor of Religion and Africana Studies Emeritus, after teaching at Oberlin College for 27 years in the Department of Religion, where he taught American and African American religious history. He received B.S.W. and M.S.W. degrees in social work from Adelphi University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in religion from Princeton University and has done further study at Union Theological Seminary in New York, New York and Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. He is also an ordained Senior Minister and a District Minister for the Midwest District in The House of The Lord Pentecostal Church.

A.G. Miller

My full name is [Albert George Miller](#), but most people know me as A.G. Miller.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Where do you currently work or where have you worked, A.G.?

A.G. Miller

I am currently retired Associate Professor of Religion and Africana studies at Oberlin College. Come June, I will have retired four years ago, after twenty-seven years of teaching in the Religion Department at Oberlin. I do some part-time teaching for Oberlin even now. But essentially, I am retired faculty.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Where were you trained, and in what disciplines?

A.G. Miller

I received my undergraduate degree at Adelphi University in Long Island, in social work. I did not have a traditional academic track; it took me five schools, three states, over seven years to finish my undergraduate degree, at Adelphi, in social work. Then, I did a master's degree in social work at Adelphi as well, and later pursued an MDiv at Union Theological Seminary. I left halfway through that program, took a job from New York to Colorado, and then enrolled at Iliff School of Theology where I worked with [Vincent Harding](#). About four years into that particular job, I applied to Princeton and did a PhD there, working with [Albert Raboteau](#).

I had the best of all worlds; at Union was the time when I got to know [Jim Washington](#), [Jim Cone](#), [Jim Forbes](#), and [Cornel West](#), all in very different ways. Then, from Union to Iliff with Vincent Harding, and from Harding to Princeton with Raboteau.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

You anticipated my next question, which was, who were your mentors, advisors, or teachers?

A.G. Miller

Jim Washington. I cut my teeth on Black theology in the early seventies with Cone's first, second, and third books. But I found myself always reading history and being fascinated with it. So, when I got to Union, I took courses with Jim Washington, who took me in.

We had a small course with only about three or four students. Jim says to me then, "You know what, I wish I could just turn this into a reading course, being you and I." So, he was signaling something to me. Jim became an early mentor for me. When I applied to Princeton I called Jim, and at the time, he happened to be teaching on sabbatical (he was fighting for tenure at that point). He left Union, came to Oberlin, and taught for a year at Oberlin when I called him and said, "Jim, I am applying to Princeton with Raboteau" and he says, "Oh, brother Al! You know, you could come back to Union and work with me." and I respond that, "I know that, but let me let me see what happens at Princeton" Because, at that time, Union required one have at least an MDiv to be admitted to the PhD program. But Princeton did not have that requirement. I was still plucking away at something in Iliff that I had yet to finish because I was working full-time. Princeton did not mind as long as I had the right credentials that they wanted. So, I applied. Jim wrote one of the recommendations for me and I was admitted into Princeton. Albert Raboteau was the only reason I went there.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Do you recall any of the courses you took at both Union and Princeton?

A.G. Miller

Absolutely. I took Jim Cone's Introduction to Theology course. In fact, I worked with [George Cummings](#) who was my TA for Jim Cone's Introduction to Theology class. George and I became very close friends as a result of that. In fact, I married him and his second wife, [Althea](#), who was the Secretary at Union when they fell in love, and the 'whole nine yards'. So, I took that course with him. I also took a course on America Religious History with Washington. I took Cone's first class on Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. (Mx and MLK class). Cone was beginning to write his book and decided to teach a class on the material to help him write, and I suspect that he outlined all the chapters. It was an amazing class, because [Dwight Hopkins](#) was in that class. [Linda Thomas](#) was married to Dwight for a while, in Chicago. [Kelly Brown Douglas](#) was in that class. [Ben Chavis](#) was in that class.

It was a whole range of folk in the who's who in the field, both in terms of theology and activism. We all took that first class together. In fact, once I got to Oberlin. I dusted off that course, and I taught the course as a first-year seminar. In fact, when they called me back to teach that first year Seminar, on Malcolm X and Martin King Jr., it was based on what I picked up from Cone. Of course, I took the preaching course with Jim Forbes.

I never took a course with Cornel, but Cornel and I had another relationship. I invited Cornel to our church in Brooklyn, prior to my even applying to Union. As you read the introduction to [Prophesy Deliverance!](#), he mentions me and the House of Lord Church and [Reverend Daughtry](#), because it was my invitation for him to speak to our leadership (depending on which book you read, he has several different versions of it) as to how that book came about. But he certainly presented it at our church for the first time. It was wonderful, because I would come up every week and get a copy of a syllabus or chapter, and I did not realize it was a book until about the third time and thought, wait a minute, it looks like he is writing something here. Sure enough, it was each of the chapters of the book that he presented to us. We were basically the first in the in the country to hear his thinking.

Anyway, all those folk influenced me in real, significant ways. Of course, two years after I got to Princeton, Cornel ends up there too. All our paths have weaved and crossed.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

It almost seems to me, as you are describing it, a network of black, religious, intellectual life was being cultivated during this period.

A.G. Miller

That is absolutely correct. What was so amazing is that at one point, when I got to Princeton, there were four Black folks in that department, at the PhD level in religion (and I was the fourth). In the early seventies a Black woman started there. In fact, my colleague, [Paula Richman](#), taught at Oberlin in Hinduism for years. She started at Princeton then went to the University of Chicago. She had a colleague who was a Black woman, [Phyllis D. Thompson](#), who was one of the earliest in the late seventies that was at Princeton.

Then, [Richard Brent Turner](#) who the book on the [Ahmadiyya in Islam](#). He taught at the University of Iowa. He came before Al got there and was having a hard time. He did two years and by the time Al arrived and was still finishing exams. Al started working with him and did a course or two with him. Then, Turner ended up going to Boston and teaching at a public school. He wrote his dissertation in Boston because it was not the friendliest environment. To put it delicately, there were many hot-shot, white men — all of whom were nice — but, to navigate that space as an African American male was not the easiest, and I think Al came in and really worked with him. Then, he took off. It was in my second summer at Princeton when Turner

returned, wrote his dissertation, and decided he was going to finish, and he defended his dissertation.

[Mike Dyson](#) was the third person at Princeton when I arrived. Mike called me and said, "Hey, man, there is this brother that is going to defend his dissertation and we need to go to his defense. He would be the first Black person to get a PhD from the religion department." I responded, "Okay let's go." So, we went, and Turner successfully defended his dissertation. I had come in that year, so I was the fourth person in the department. Then [Judith Weisenfeld](#) came.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

What years were you at Princeton?

A.G. Miller

I was at Princeton from 1986 to 1991, five years.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

What was your dissertation about?

A.G. Miller

[Theophilus Gould Steward](#), the AME minister from 1843 to 1924. Al did a survey course on African American Religion. He gets to the reconstruction era and discusses both the nadir and theodicy, and how that plays out in the minds and thinking of late nineteenth century activists, theologians, pastors, etc. He used the Theophilus Gould Steward book, [The End of the World](#), as an example, and that caught me, it was an interesting idea. So, after the class I asked if Al has the book, *the End of the World*.

He replies that he has a photocopy. I asked if he would mind sharing it with me and he said not a problem and gave it to me. I made my own copy of it, started reading it, and thought, wow this guy is very interesting. This led to me exploring what else Steward has written. I picked him as — I do not know if they still do this at Princeton, but you have a movement, either pre-sixteenth century or non-American period, a personality, or a century.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Oh, it has changed a lot. But can you lay this out?

A.G. Miller

If I remember, I had to cover a movement. So, my movement exam was on Pentecostalism. I had to do either a priest, sixteenth century or pre-sixteenth century, pre-American period. I looked at African religions. So, that was my non-American context. Then, a nineteenth century survey, so I had to read everything I could on nineteenth century America Christianity, essentially. They then picked three or four questions for me to drool over during that period. Then, it was a personality, and I picked Theophilus Gould Steward as my personality, to test the waters.

I had asked Al earlier, “do you think this guy could be a be a book as well?” He responded, “I just don’t know how much you are going to find on him, you got to have some documents to work with.” So, I said, “Let me let me do some digging.” So, fifteen or sixteen books, more than one hundred articles, and five linear drawers of documents at Schaumburg Library of his personal papers later, when I lay all that stuff out there, Al says, “You clearly have enough sources to work with!” So, that is what I ended up focusing on. I did not plan to come to Princeton to do that. I was thinking of doing something that would focus on Pentecostalism and connect it to how to play around with the anthropology of religion, African retentions, and Pentecostalism. That was my initial thinking about where I would go. But Steward popped up and said, “I want you focus your attention here”, so he took over.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is amazing. Now, I think you have touched on this a little bit, what was Albert Raboteau like as an advisor working on your dissertation?

A.G. Miller

Al was laid back. He gave great advice, but he was not going to chase you around, which was all good for me. If you came to him, he would sit down and talk with you. We would have great, long conversations. I can remember when I was at coming to the deadline, because I came to Oberlin without having finished the dissertation, so they gave me a two-year window to complete it. And I was coming up scrambling at the end of that two-year period. I can remember, I was supposed to defend December 1st of that particular year, 93. But my mother-in-law who lived with us died. I came to Princeton with a tribe, I was almost thirty-five years old and had a wife, three children, and a mother-in-law who lived with us all our marriage. By the time I got to Oberlin, we had four kids and my mother-in-law. In that second year that we were here, she had continued congestive heart failure and all the major issues, so we navigated that with her. But she went home to glory, right in the middle of trying to finish this dissertation.

So, I submitted the draft and Al said, “Okay, let's talk about it at the AAR” which was in Washington, D.C. that year. I can remember sitting outside in the fountain area of this big hotel in Washington.

He said, “You need to cut out the Du Bois stuff and do this and that. That fourth chapter needs to be split in half” and so on. I am thinking, oh God, I have this deadline to meet. So, I came back. We shifted the deadline from December 1st to the 20th, for the defense. I finished in early December, turned it in, and wrote a note to Al that said I cut the Du Bois stuff out and this and that. I also said that this fourth chapter, split into two, I will do it in the book — I have got to graduate!

So, it was fun. It got to defense, and it was all good. Al, for me, was a great person to work with. I met Al through a very strange circumstance. [John “Jack” Fitzmier](#), does that name ring a bell? He is a former President of the American Academy of Religion and recently retired from that position, maybe three or four years ago. When he was in his third or fourth year at Princeton, he and I both taught at Eastern Baptist Seminary for a winter term in the month of January. I was teaching in the area of youth Ministry at this Young Life Institute, which was being accredited through Eastern Baptists. Fitzmier was teaching a course on American religious history. I was always curious about what he was teaching, and what books he was using. And I have this entire other career of working with young people and using my social work background to do that in the seminary context. So, I invited Fitzmier to lunch and said, “I would love to see what you are teaching in your class.”

He said fine, we set it up, and started talking. Our classes were next door to each other, but we were teaching entirely different stuff. We start to talk about what he is teaching in the class, what about this book and that book, etc. He asks more questions and says, “You seem to know a lot about this stuff.” I said, that, “well my bedtime reading consists of material on African American religious history. That is really my passion. That is what I do.” He asks if I am thinking about getting a PhD, and I said, “Yes, I am thinking about Iliff; Vincent Harding is there, I live in Denver; it is a possibility.” and he says “No, you are a Princeton man” I say, “Princeton? Why would I go to Princeton?” He said, “Al Raboteau” and I responded, “I’m sorry, [Slave Religion](#) Albert Raboteau? Isn’t he teaching somewhere in California?” He says that “no, he has been teaching at Princeton for about a year and a half and is trying to recruit folk. I think you need to meet Albert Raboteau.”

Note, this is in the suburbs of Philadelphia, so to get to Princeton is not far. To boot our kids who had come with me for the month, and my wife who was recovering from an ectopic pregnancy (she was just getting out of the hospital with this emergency surgery). Fitzmier is telling me to set up a meeting with Raboteau and I just said that I do not have the time. But he kept saying, “No, no, no. You must meet him, I am going to call him, and I will get back to you tomorrow.” Sure enough, Raboteau said he would love to meet. We would meet on Tuesday at, say 5:30, in Princeton 1879 Hall, etc. So, I made my way up to Princeton and walked in. I assumed I would have maybe a 15-to-20-minute meeting with this guy, but we sat down for two and a half hours. We were talking about everything. In my process, I am an ordained minister, a social worker, etc. I had all these other experiences. And Al said to me, “You know, I would probably be in the priesthood if it was not for celibacy.” He has a passion for the Church and was Catholic at that point, and I was Pentecostal.

I knew then that meant something about the kind of care and support in understanding me as a person of faith, in this department that could be perceived as faith-busting. At that point, we had a little bit of everybody. For example, [Jeff Stout](#), who was agnostic. [John Gager](#), who was almost atheist, but agnostic, teaching early formations of Christianity, late antiquity. By the way, John and I became dear friends; we would share coffee and muffins every morning in the lounge, spending time together. [John Wilson](#), my other advisor, was all about the sociology of history. But Al understood the importance of what faith meant in this conversation. [Martha Himmelfarb](#) she, too, was a Jewish person of faith. So, our department was all over the place.

But I could feel comfortable being in that environment with Al, knowing that he understood my commitments to the Church and faith. Moreover, that this held importance in terms of what it meant to explore the scholarship and understanding that there were faith implications for this.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

So, that regard for faith and the sacred.

A.G. Miller

Yes exactly, the sacred. I do not know what it was like when you were there, but the two main courses one takes in the first and second year, you study Wittgenstein and those guys.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Using methods.

A.G. Miller

Yes, that is right. Then, in the second half you read the anthropologists and all those folk. [Victor Preller](#), who probably long passed since when you were there, was Jeff Stout's mentor and a Wittgenstein scholar. He was reading all, and Whitehead and all those folk. So, I came into Princeton trying to figure out, what in the world are all these people saying? I have never read anything like this. Of course, when we got to Marx and Weber, those folk I could understand. But with these other Germans, I did not know what this philosophical theology stuff was.

But Al gave me great advice. When I came in, that first year was the same year Al took off for Stanford. He told me, during the fly-in program that he would be off to Stanford for the year, because of a fellowship. I said, "Al, I am moving livestock and barrel, with a wife, three kids and mother-in-law, to come here. Are you coming back from Stanford? Let me know now, because I do not want to be stuck in Princeton if you won't be here." He smiled and said "No, I will return." That fall when I arrived, he had not left yet. I was almost thirty-five when I arrived. So, I was an old man in the department, in terms of the new folk who had come in. I did not have any

ivy or baby ivy pedigrees behind me. So, I came in with a very different kind of trajectory to the field.

They were all young, smart whippersnappers with Harvard, Smith, Amherst, and Oberlin — these high-powered schools and programs — that was just not me. He said, “Look A.G., let me tell you something. Do not compare yourself to others. You come with your own set of strengths, experiences and abilities. Do not do the comparisons games. You will be just fine.” For a kid who barely finished high school, was kicked out of high school for fighting a teacher, took four years to get out of a three-year high school, had to repeat the senior year, started academics again at the University of Missouri — on a whim and a prayer — then five schools, three states, seven years later, to finish an undergraduate degree and now to be in the environment at Princeton, the imposter syndrome was thick. Trying to come to grips with belonging here and having a seat at this table. This is what he was trying to push me toward, which was critical.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is amazing. Thank you for sharing that.

The next question I would like to raise is two-fold: how would you describe your research agenda in the field and how do you identify methodologically as a scholar of Black religion?

A.G. Miller

I am a historian of American and African American religious history. Obviously, if you work with Albert Raboteau and John Wilson, you must draw upon the social sciences more broadly. To look at the African traditions you must think of anthropologists, historians of religion, and others to think and reshape how those fit into your agenda. I also draw on theology. Thinking theologically came, in part, through the work that I had done with Cone, both the reading of Cone and classes with Cone. This helped to set me up in certain ways to tackle Theophilus Gould Steward, who was a historical figure, but a major theological influence, particularly in the AME Church tradition. He was also an activist that is, a pastor, and a social political player. Wherever he found himself, he was engaged in social change. So, I like to think of the ways in which my scholarship plays with all those areas of thinking about social change, theology, and the grounded historical traditions.

The work that I have done on Pentecostalism, part of my Pentecostalism is a social movement, to think about the ways in which Pentecostalism has been both, interpreted and influenced by the sociology of religion (Good, bad, or indifferent). Also, deprivation theory, the limits thereof of what that means, and how it was used to in some ways to denigrate Black religious experience and interpret it in certain ways.

Certainly, coming out of this realm, faith and religion would eventually die, then science and social science would bring new knowledge into the world (um... well). The ways that I continue to work on Black Evangelicalism and thinking about that movement. African Americans who

were — how do we define what that means to be? It used to be that the word “fundamentalist” was a dirty word. Now, saying “evangelical” is a dirty word in the beginning part of the Twenty-second century. But, in the late eighties and nineties, one could say evangelical and fundamentalists, and how they distinguish between the two. But consider how Black folk fit into that. How would one interpret that? What does that mean when? When people of faith believe in resurrection and virgin birth, and yet also understand their place of oppression in the context of society, denominations, or churches, etc. And how they navigate that space.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is amazing. It sounds to me that, by working with James Cone and Albert Raboteau, you learned how to take seriously Black people's theology and belief, as a form of historical inquiry.

A.G. Miller

And Jim Washington. Do you know [Eugene Lowe](#)?

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Yes, Eugene Lowe is [now] at Northwestern.

A.G. Miller

At the time, he was the Dean of students at Princeton. During my first year he had an appointment in the religion department. When Al took off that fall, I was thinking, who will I work with? Then, Eugene approached me. Now, Eugene has this air about him that could be standoffish (at least at that time), and I marked him that way at Union because he was very aloof. But [Moses Moore](#), who finished his PhD at Union with Jim Washington, pulled my tail and said, “Look, man, you need to give Eugene Lowe a second look. He could be a very valuable resource to you. Do not be worried about what other people say about him.

I said, okay, and I met him in the last standing lounge. We speak, and he asks what classes I am taking. I respond that, I don't know, I am trying to figure out all this stuff. He says, “Why don't we do a reading course together?” As to the nineteenth century social justice movements or something to that order. He and I did this reading course together, and it was one of the best things that I did. It helped to ground me. Eugene became a friend and a mentor in that same context and setting and I think the world of him.

So, you are right. It is all those contexts that helped to shape the ways in which I was both affirmed and pushed to think as a religious historian. For example, how do you look at this material and take Black people seriously? And take what Black people say seriously? If they say

they believe, then, let's take that seriously rather than dismiss it for whatever reason. I also add my sociological interpretation to it, to explain them away.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Yes, Believing black people and people's religious innovation.

A.G. Miller

By the time I left Princeton, there were maybe fifteen or sixteen black folk in that department.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Wow!

A.G. Miller

I do not know what it was like when you were there. But by the time I left, Mike had come and left, I was there, Judith was there.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

[Leslie Callahan?](#)

A.G. Miller

Leslie had yet to arrive. [Yvonne Chireau](#) was there, as well as [Victor Anderson](#). [Bill Heart](#) was there.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Was [Eddie Glaude](#) there yet?

A.G. Miller

Eddie came the year I left; he transferred and graduated from Temple, then came up the year I left in 1991. He came in the fall of 91. [Obery Hendricks](#) was there. [Ian Straker](#) who did

American religious history, he had yet to finish, but was part of that cohort. I mean you could name all the folk.

So, that lounge was that meeting place where people took over. One night, we were about ten or twelve of us sitting around in the lounge, all Black people, talking, doing what one does in the lounge, and somebody white walked in and stopped, saying “Oh, Am I interrupting a meeting?” We looked at him and said “What?!” We were ‘plotting to take over!’ We were just hanging out in the lounge and talking. That four or five-year period was really, I mean from where it was just one or two of us at the end of my fifth year, we had all this talent and giftedness. It was such a diverse group of folk studying a little bit of everything. It was a very different kind of place by the time I left in 91, than when I came in 86.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is amazing.

A.G. Miller

I took a course with Obery Hendricks when I was at Columbia, and when I was about to head to Princeton, he spoke a lot about that time at the university. He was a seminarian and he and I became racquetball partners. He was applying to his PhD program at the Seminary to work with [James Charlesworth](#) and I said, “Man, you need to come over and have a conversation with [John Gager](#). By the time it was over, he was accepted into the PhD program and worked with John Gager and the rest is history.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

In the remaining time we have, I want to hear from you about how you interpret Raboteau, Cone, — we did not talk much about [Katie Cannon](#) — but how do you interpret their roles in shaping the field of Black religious studies?

A.G. Miller

This may be an overstatement, but I say in my class that I do not think that there was much in the field of American religious and African American religious history, before Albert Raboteau, and after Albert Raboteau. [Slave Religion](#) was such a demarcation mark in the study of the field.

I understand we have [Eugene Genovese](#) and all these other players. But to consider the fact that you have [Sydney Ahlstrom](#) on one hand, [John Blassingame](#) on the other hand, both influence in a way in which Raboteau is thinking about.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes
And [Lawrence Levine](#).

A.G. Miller

Exactly. Thinking about these issues. Raboteau can find the voice amid this, because some of his scholarship is reading between the lines of white folks who are talking about, and to tease out the Black voice, in that context. In order to reshape and give voice to the Black expression of what their religious experiences were about and like. He and [Sterling Stuckey](#) would go back and forth. They both agree that [Ring Shout](#) was important, but, to what degree? How does one navigate that? But still, that book, as many times as I have taught and assigned it to students (I do a lot of teaching now, not only for Oberlin, but I also teach for Ashland Theological Seminary, and they have programs on Black clergy across the Great Lakes). I still keep my fingers in teaching to the Black clergy, and once they read Raboteau, it helps them. They are not afraid of thinking about the influence of African religions on their spirituality. Because he explains it to them in a way that makes sense.

I guarantee you, when I teach this stuff that is about returning to Africa and looking at African religious traditions, whether it is the Yoruba tradition, or the Congolese traditions, etc. Nkisi and the importance of that, the only thing they have in their mind is that this “devil worship” material. That is all they can see. But it is the reading of the way in which Raboteau slices through that and clarifies it. Then, this ecstatic spirituality has value. Now, they understand why we respect the elders and honor the ancestors. So, they shape it, and it becomes a whole different kind of reassessing of themselves, once one reads Raboteau. I also think that one can consider the scholarship in terms of the way in which scholarship was shaped before *Slave Religion*, and the new scholars. Since then, they have had to work their way through Raboteau, in order to be able to give these new interpretations. So, for me, Raboteau is essential. He is obviously not the only one. But I think we need to give him his due.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

There really is no [field of] African American religious history without *Slave Religion*.

A.G. Miller

There is not. Because Raboteau gave voice to it. In a similar way that Blassingame’s [The Slave Community](#) gives voice to African American culture. He was following Blassingame’s model.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is right. This rich moment in the seventies. That is insightful. Another question for consideration is, if you could say something to Raboteau, what would that be?

A.G. Miller

You have to give me a minute. [pause] Thank you for being a friend. Above all, he never treated me as an understudy. It was always a colleague. I am now seventy, he was seventy-eight when he died, so there is an eight-year difference between us. I would just thank him for being a friend — above all the scholarship, the directions that he moved in the latter part of his scholarly life, the shift and coming to terms with Catholicism. But finding this new home in Russian orthodoxy. Initially, I thought that was a strange move. But I then realized he grew up in this world of ritual. Ritual was in his blood.

This was a way for him to continue with what he saw was the best of that ancient Catholic tradition, without much of, what he saw, as the baggage that came with it. Instead, to stay within that great, long line of the of catholicism (small 'c'). So, when he moved to organize the community there in Princeton I said, oh he is going back to becoming a priest again I wondered; Al, do you feel like it is too late for you to go through ordination? Because now he can go through ordination. I think he just modeled stuff for me.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is amazing.

A.G. Miller

He affirmed for me that I could be deeply rooted in a Church tradition but also be deeply rooted as a scholar. One can do this and be a kind person. That for me, was who Al was. About a week before he passed, we got a hold of his wife, and my wife and I were able to talk with him. He could not get a lot out at that point. But we could tell by his attempts to speak that he was he was responding to who we were and what we were saying. It was the kind of love that he had for all the students.

He and his first wife, Kathy, were just, when we were going through the crisis with my mother-in-law; my kids would stay at his house because we ran off to Philadelphia, to the major hospitals to try to take care of her.

They had four and we had three kids, and they would all go to Al and Kathy's house, stay there and go to school. So, there was a different kind of doctor-father relationship. There was real, genuine respect, but he understood.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Wow. A deep connection. Thank you so much for sharing that. My last question for you is, sitting with this kind of intellectual genealogy, of which you are a part of, expressing this deep connection to Raboteau, where would you like to see the field go?

A.G. Miller

Let me think about that for a minute.

But I want to say something about Katie Cannon. You have heard a little bit about my relationship with Cone. In fact, going back to Cone for a second, he was always encouraging to me, although I was not one of his official students. Cone encouraged me — not once, but twice — to apply to Union, to teach in the American religious history. This was the position Jim had. The first time was right after he passed. He probably went to a whole bunch of us, but we were all too angry with Union at that point to be able to see it.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Why angry?

A.G. Miller

We just felt like Jim was under a lot of pressure at Union. There was the aneurysm, which we think was contributed by all the pressure he experienced at Union, that took him out too early.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Forty-eight, right?

A.G. Miller

Yes, exactly. So, many of his students could have applied. In fact, Cone called me and said they are looking for someone and I would like you to consider taking it. Then, in fact, I did. I went to an initial interview, in San Francisco. There was a committee of folk, AAR of course. Among the group of folk were some white female students, and they were very angry: “Well, how do you incorporate women into your syllabus!?”

I said, “I am sorry, have you read my syllabus? Have you looked at both, the people who I talk about and the scholars who I use in my syllabus?” I make sure that every session has something that relates to it, etc. It was just the tone and anger, a kind of harshness. Then, I saw what Jim was dealing with there. I am not interested in going into that environment. So, I withdrew and said no, thank you very much.

Then they ended up with Michael Harris who was there for ten years. Then, I received another call from Jim Cone. With that high voice of his, "I think you need to apply to union!"

I am sorry about this; I am going to get to Katie but my first encounter with Jim Cone was in the winter of 1971, February, at the University of Missouri. I was a first-year student there, flunking out. Cone came to speak at Black History month with his book, [Black Theology and Black Power](#). remember the timeframe of 1971, the revolution was coming, and everyone is for it, Afros, and so on.

He came and lit that place up. I was a fairly, newly recommitted Christian then, trying to figure my way out of my own little Pentecostal environment, in this largely white university with very few Black folk there and connected with these InterVarsity Christian Fellowship folk. So, I am trying to find my faith and my place. I went to hear Cone, and at the end of the event, just as everyone left the auditorium, I walked down to him. "Dr. Cone, can I ask you a question?" He looks down at me (I am below, and he is up on the stage), "I just need to ask you; do you believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ?" Cone looked at me and smiled. He then said, "If you mean, do I believe there is going to be a better day? Yes! I believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ. If you mean that we can change tomorrow, yes, I believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ!"

Then, his partner, the guy who hosted him said, "Jim, come on. We need to go get some beers or something." And he said, "Good to talk to you, young man!" Then, I was in Missouri, and it was not until 1979 or 80 when I arrived at Union, nine years later, I began to have a deeper friendship and professorial relationship with Jim Cone. It is amazing.

Katie Cannon was a Doctoral student at Union. When I got to New York in 1975, I was worshipping at the house of Lord Church in Brooklyn, and Katie Cannon would come, annually, to the church. This is an activist Black Pentecostal Church in Brooklyn, and she would be the women's day speaker almost every year for four to six years. Not many people know that.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

At a Pentecostal Church?

A.G. Miller

Yes, at the house of the Lord Church [Herbert Daughtry](#). His wife, [Karen Daughtry](#), his daughter, [Leah Daughtry](#). Bishop Leah is my bishop at the church that I serve. But Karen Daughtry would invite Katie Cannon and she would come and give the women's day sermon every year. That was in that context that I met her, at the church. As I was thinking through applying to Union in 1979/1980, I went up to Union and bumped into her in the hallway. She asked, "What are you doing up here?"

I said, I am working on an application to Union. She said, “Oh that is great! Have you heard of [Benjamin May’s fellowship?](#)” I said, no. She said, “it is a fund for theological education. Give me your information, I am going to nominate you!” Katie Cannon nominated me for the Benjamin May’s fellowship, and I received the fellowship, at Union, when enrolled in the winter of 1981. Katie and I maintained a friendship.

Then, when I got to Oberlin, Katie called me and said, “Miller, I have something I need you to do for me. The AAR asked me to put together a panel of teachers that will help people who are not in the discipline, and others who are, to teach African American religion in their various disciplines. It is called ‘Mining the Motherlode’, and I get to pick the faculty to work with and I want you to be one of the faculty members.” She then pulled the team together but fell out with the previous head of the AAR (this is before Jack Fitzmier), and her mother was ill. So, she called me and said that she was backing out of this, but for us to move forward.

One of the people who she recruited was [Emilie Townes](#). So, I called and said, “Emilie, look, Katie's backing out. You need to take up this lead, and I am willing to stick in and go with it. But you need to be there — because I did not know about all the politics of the AAR, but she said she did, so we reconfigured it. We that, mining the motherload. But it was all because of Katie Cannon.

That was her brainchild. So, at different points of my educational/professional life, she interjected herself into my life and I am forever grateful. Emilie, I, and a couple of others ended up doing other things with the with the Wabash Center and other stuff, but that was all because of Katie's influence and impression.

Where would I like to see this go? That is a good question. Because I think that there are a lot of young and new voices in the field. And that is good. I do not particularly know, but I think there also must be a place for folk of faith — and when I say that I say it broadly. Whether it is Christianity, Islam, traditional religions and others, to be able to find their scholarly voices in the field. To speak, be able to investigate, discover and even interrogate their own traditions. From a quasi-insider voice, but outside of voice. I have never bought the idea that one has this objective — nobody's objective when we are talking about Scholarship.

[Mama Lola](#) by Karen McCarthy Brown was, in some ways, groundbreaking. She was invited to give a talk to the graduate students at Princeton, just as the book was coming out. We got a chance to hear her and her path. But what I thought was most fascinating was that as she explored Alourdes, she was also exploring herself.

The impact that this religious tradition was having upon her, and that she could not be a distant observer, but it acquired her to have skin in the game. To be able to have any kind of authenticity as an insider, one had to make a stake and a claim — even be critical of it — but one still must have a stake and a claim. Whether it's Albert, Katie, or Jim Washington, they each had their own skin in the game. I cannot speak to Charles Long; he is in some ways an enigma unto himself. But he comes out of this religious tradition of Black Baptists and pastors and understands this kind of Arkansas religious experience.

So, he is in a similar way. But, considering those three, they are all in their own ways tethered to their religious traditions,

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

And unashamedly so!

A.G. Miller

That is exactly right.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

This is so helpful. And I think the celebration and affirmation of belief, the idea that the Black scholar of Black religion does not have belief or ritual or practice, is something I think we must contest. This is wonderful, thank you so much for your time.