

***American Religious History for Advanced Undergraduates and Graduate Students
Edward J. Blum, PhD***

Course Overview:

American religious history examines the importance of religious ideas, leaders, movements, institutions, organizations, and ideologies throughout American history. It is particularly interested in religious change over time from the age of exploration to the present. In part, this course is about theology, ministers, and hymns; but it is also a rambunctious jaunt through religion and material culture, the commodification of the sacred, the making and transformations of holidays, the ways faith has been used for social and political change, the influence of religion on major political moments in American history, and how concepts of “what is religious” have influenced society and politics (and been influenced by them). This class focuses upon religion and colonialism, nationalism, politics, race, class, gender, sexuality, war, diversity, justice, and material culture.

This course begins with New World encounters as North and South Americans, Europeans, and Africans made religious sense of their experiences. It proceeds through the formation of the United States, the role of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the major shifts in America’s religious cultures, the coming, fighting, resolving of the Civil War, the rise of an industrial nation, the Great Depression, the Cold War, the Civil Rights movement, the rise of the new conservatism and beyond. We will pay particular attention to the role of religion in animating American politics, society, economics, and systems of oppression and resistance. We will focus on a variety of religious traditions, including Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, indigenous faiths, spiritualism, and Judaism.

History is not just in books; it is alive, as pertinent and relevant today as it was in the past. It comes to us in countless ways, through music, movies, novels, pictures, written texts, and conversations with others. This class, therefore, will attempt to engage history through a variety of methods. Examining everything from poetry to personal letters, novels and films, sermons and songs, we will delve into the world of religion in the American experience.

The reading expectation for this course is gigantic, because the study of religion in life is gigantic. Religion invades and pervades every facet of the American historical experience and it is my goal to have you read and digest a wide array of primary and secondary sources. You are not expected to read every word or remember every main point.

What to expect from me:

Because history comes alive only when it is seen and felt, imagined and re-imagined, we will use photographs, cartoons, music, food, drink, and anything else that will draw your attention. This class will be noisy; you will not fall asleep; and with any luck, you’ll be riveted. I will do anything and everything in my power to make this an enjoyable and productive class, and if you have suggestions for how that can be done, feel free to share them with me. We are all still learning. Furthermore, I will return your papers and exams in a timely fashion. That means within one week.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will probe main themes and discussions in American religious history, including the importance of religion in shaping structures of oppression and contours of resistance, the vitality of spirituality in individual and community experiences
- Students will discern historical relationships between religion and broader trends in American history, including colonization, slavery, the rise of democracy, the market revolution, the Civil War, the birth of modernism, the Civil Rights Movement, and the post-Civil Rights era.
- Students will interrogate primary and secondary sources on religion in American history
- Students will argue in writing and in conversation using appropriate evidence and critical imagination.
- Students will use interpretative tools, including historical empathy, imagination, and interdisciplinary discourse, to study and write history.

Course Assignments and Grade Breakdown

Course Assignments

- Grades for this course will be evaluated by attendance and participation, by locating and reviewing primary documents, and by writing analytical essays based upon materials in the course. Half of the participation grade will be based upon attendance (after the third missed class, I will begin to deduct points); the other half will be based upon active voicing of opinions, group dialogues, and questions.
- Each student will locate **five** primary documents (one at a time), make a copy of each document to turn in, and write a two-page essay reviewing and examining each document in light of the course material (lecture, readings, and discussion). The primary document must be from the time period for the week and related to the topics of the reading. A maximum of two of the documents can be obtained from the Internet. The document can be a newspaper or magazine article, a song or poem, a cartoon, painting, or photograph, a set of statistics, a sermon, a page or two from a novel, an artifact, an autobiography, or a play. Anything produced during the time period under discussion will be accepted.
- Your long essay and final take home exam will consist of double-spaced, ten-to-twelve-page thesis papers. In them, you will be asked to analyze the texts we are reading in class in the context of the material presented in classroom lectures and discussion.
- Graduate students will write an extra essay, which will be a comparative book review of three monographs on any topic of historiographical significance in American religious history. The professor must approve all graduate student topics.

Grade Breakdown:

Undergraduate Students

Participation: 10%
Primary Document Selection: 10%
Primary Document Essays: 20%
Paper #1: 30%
Final Take Home Exam: 30%

Graduate Students

Participation: 10%
Primary Document Selection: 10%
Primary Document Essays: 20%
Paper #1: 20%
Paper #2: 20%
Final Historiographical Essay: 20%

Required Texts:

1. Patrick Allitt, ed., *Major Problems in American Religious History: Documents and Essays* (1995).
2. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
3. Griffith, R. Marie, ed., *American Religions: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
4. Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Movement* (2006)
5. Paul Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in Nineteenth-Century America* (1995).

--Schedule--

Week 1: Defining Religion, Defining America, Defining American Religious History

Introductions: what is American religious history? What is America? What is religion/religious? What is history?

Week 2: The Age of Discovery: Faith and Colonialism

Reading

- Edmund Morgan, "John Winthrop's 'Modell of Christian Charity' in a Wider Context," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 145-151.
- John Winthrop, "Modell of Christian Charity"
- John Cotton, "Spirtuall Milk for Boston Babes in Either England" in Griffith, ed.
- Amanda Porterfield, "Witchcraft and the Colonization of Algonquian and Iroquois Cultures," *Religion and American Culture* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 103-124.

Week 3: Religion in Colonial Society: Gender, Society, and Native Faiths

Reading

- Janet Moore Lindman, "Acting the Manly Christian: White Evangelical Masculinity in Revolutionary Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (April 2000): 393-416.
- Increase Mather, "Sleeping at Sermons is a Great and a Dangerous Evil" in Griffith, ed.
- Mary Rowlandson, "A Narrative of the Captivity" in Griffith, ed.
- Finke and Stark, chapter 2: "The Colonial Era Revisited"
- Rebecca Goetz, "'The Child Should be Made a Christian': Baptism, Race, and Identity in the Early Chesapeake," in John Garrigus, ed., *Race and Identity in the New World*

Primary Assignment #1 Due

Week 4: The Great Awakening, African American, and Native American Traditions

Reading

- Allitt, chapter 4: "Awakening and American Revolution"
- John Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," in Griffith, ed.
- Phillis Wheatley poems, in Griffith, ed.
- John Woolman, "From the Journal of John Woolman," in Griffith, ed.
- Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African American and Native American Literatures*, chapters 1 and 2.

Week 5: The Early Republic: Religion, Politics, and New Faiths

Reading

- Allitt, chapter 5: “Religion in the Early Republic”
- Thomas Jefferson, “A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom,” in Griffith, ed.
- Finke and Starke, chapter 3: “The Upstarts Win America”

Primary Assignment #2 Due

Week 6: Market Revolution: Economy, Class, and Evangelicalism

Reading

- Katherine Carte Engel, *Religion and Profit: Moravians in Early America*, chapter 4.
- J. Spencer Fluhman, “Anti-Mormonism and the Question of Religious Authenticity in Antebellum America,” *Journal of Religion and Society*
- Paul Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias*
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Harvard Divinity School Address,” in Griffith, ed.

Paper #1 Due

Week 7: The Second Great Awakening: Birth of the Abolitionist and Feminist Movements

Reading

- Nancy Isenberg, “Pillars in the Same Temple and Priests of the Same Worship”: Woman’s Rights and the Politics of Church and State in Antebellum America,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 85, No. 1. (Jun., 1998), pp. 98-128.
- Charles Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, chapter 4.
- Allitt, chapter 6: “Antebellum Immigration and Social Tensions”
- Jarena Lee, “From the Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee,” in Griffith, ed.
- Angelina Emily Grimke, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* (1836) in Griffith, ed.
- Catharine E. Beecher, *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism* (1837) in Griffith, ed.

Week 8: The Civil War and Reconstruction: Faith and the Battlefields

Reading

- Samuel J. Watson, “Religion and Combat Motivation in the Confederate Armies,” *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 58, No. 1. (Jan., 1994), pp. 29-55.
- Edward J. Blum, “Introduction: Race, Religion, and the Fracturing of the White Republic,” in *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898*, introduction.
- Randall Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South*, chapter 2.
- Allitt, chapter 7

Primary Assignment #3 Due

Week 9: The Gilded Age and Progressive Era: Immigration, Racism, Urbanization, and Diversity

Reading

- Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom*, chapter 2.

- Herbert G. Gutman, “Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age,” *The American Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (October 1966): 74-101.
- Leigh Eric Schmidt, “The Commercialization of the Calendar: American Holidays and the Culture of Consumption, 1870-1930,” *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 3 (December 1991): 887-916.
- Allitt, chapter 8: “Urban Reform”
- Narratives of Americanization and Resistance Black Elk, *From Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (1932) in Griffith, ed.
- Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (1912) in Griffith, ed.
- Swami Vivekananda, *Hinduism as a Religion and Farewell* (1893) in Griffith, ed.
- Finke and Starke, chapter 4: “The Coming of the Catholics”

Week 10: Great Depression: Economics and Want

Reading

- Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*, chapters 7, 8, and 9
- “M. A. to Eleanor Roosevelt” (1934)
- “J. B. to Eleanor Roosevelt” (1937)
- “Tore Up and a-Movin”
- “The Communion Credit Card” (1930)
- “Prayers that Worked,” (1939)

Week 11: Cold War to Civil Rights Movement

Reading

- Allitt, chapter 12: “Religion and Protest Movements”
- Sermons by Billy Graham
- Howard Thurman, “What We May Learn from India” (1936) in Griffith, ed.

Primary Assignment #4 Due

Week 12: The Civil Rights Movement

Reading

- Paul Harvey, *Freedom’s Coming*
- Edward J. Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois, American Prophet*, chapter 4.

Week 13: New Religious Movements

Reading

- Joy Harjo, “Eagle Poem” (1990) in Griffith, ed.
- Lucille Clifton, “spring song” (1987) in Griffith, ed.
- Lucille Clifton, “the light that came to lucille clifton” (1980), and “testament” (1980) in Griffith, ed.
- Finke and Starke, chapter 7: “Why ‘Mainline’ Denominations Decline”
- Kathryn Lofton, “Public Confessions: Oprah Winfrey’s American Religious History,” *Women & Performance: a journal of Feminist Theory*, 18:1 (March 2008): 49-67.

Primary Assignment #5 Due

Week 14: The New Political Right and the “Moral” Majority

Reading

- Allitt, chapter 15
- Darren Dochuk, “Praying for a Wicked City’: Congregation, Community, and the Suburbanization of Fundamentalism,” in *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 13 (Summer 2003): 167-204.
- Stanley Hauerwas, “Gay Friendship: A Thought Experiment in Catholic Moral Theology” (1998) in Griffith, ed.
- “Letter to Franklin Graham from the Council on American-Islamic Relations” (2002), in Griffith, ed.

Week 15: Summing Up: Religion in the Twenty-First Century

Paper #2 Due