

AMERICAN PREACHING: WORD, PERFORMANCE, AND MEDIA
Prof. M. Cooper Harriss (Indiana University)

Institutional Context: Founded in 1820, Indiana University's flagship Bloomington campus hosted 49,635 students in 2016 – more than 39,000 of which were undergraduates. The College of Arts and Sciences remains a primary home for most undergraduates, though business and emerging and reorganizing schools of Global Studies, Media, Public Health, and Art, Architecture, and Design have begun to reframe the undergraduate landscape in preparation for the university's bicentennial initiatives.

Departmental Context: The Department of Religious Studies at Indiana University celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2015, and has been long recognized for its strength within the College of Arts and Sciences and within the field of religious studies. The faculty consists of 20 tenured or tenure-stream faculty and 10 affiliates from other departments (including English, Law, History, and Folklore and Ethnomusicology).

The department currently enrolls 33 graduate students (28 PhD students and candidates, 5 MA students) who may select from 11 areas of study. The department's recent placement record is impressive. The undergraduate program remains robust, though in keeping with university- and nation-wide trends the number of majors has declined this decade. This reflects a number of problems that are largely beyond the department's control, ranging from the professionalization of higher education to the fact that freshmen often arrive on campus with majors declared and course needs stringently outlined for their entire career, eliminating the process of "discovery" that often draws people to the study of religion. Enrollments on the whole remain strong thanks to large service courses providing General Ed and other core distribution credits, and the department has sought to emphasize the minor as an attractive "value-added" component for students who feel compelled to study something "practical," yet also wish to engage the more intellectually rigorous curriculum of religious studies. While it would be gratifying to see more robust quantitative "affirmations" of departmental health, these numbers also yield a magnificent departmental environment of close relationships between faculty and students more commonly associated with institutions enrolling 2,000 students instead of 50,000. Faculty often "pitch" potential majors by noting, truly, that "we offer the educational experience of a small liberal arts college in the context of a Big Ten university."

Pedagogical Approach: I anticipate this course will be small in subscription. It is capped at 20 undergraduate and 5 graduate students, though I expect somewhere in the range of the 10-12 undergraduates and 2-3 graduate students that my other courses of this ilk and at this level – "Irony in Religion and Literature" and "Zora Neale Hurston," for instance – usually draw.

This class is a seminar built around conversation that I seek to elicit and manage over the 75-minute meeting. I bring a couple of strategies to make this happen: 1) Regular reading responses, which I read last (and just before the start of class), after establishing my lesson plan. This allows me to see trends, lacunae, places where students want to go that I may not have anticipated, what flummoxes them. The responses also provide accountability to the reading and the chance to process information (page to eyes to

brain to hands to message board). I feel much better cold calling on silent students (and often being offered a soft entrée to the conversation brings out more from otherwise reticent participants). I find they generally read one another's responses and have conversations established before class, etc. 2) This is a piggyback class (grads and undergrads together), which can be difficult because it adds a further dimension of intellectual range to the classroom dynamic. Though we have separate meetings and readings in addition to the regularly scheduled ones, grad students often find these regular classroom encounters elementary at best, and in worst-case scenarios the resentment will creep both ways. In the attempt to combat this, I enlist the graduate students as pedagogical co-conspirators, commenting and encouraging on the message board, holding back and participating in the classroom in strategic ways that enrich undergraduate learning, even as they are welcome to offer their own genuine remarks and questions. I find that this engages them as thoughtful pedagogues working to put prior and new knowledge to work in real time. In this way I can harness the two best parts of teaching in my department – excellent and creative graduate students and the opportunity to linger – to *loaf* (to borrow Whitman's word) – in ways that model both intellectual engagement and the communities that can emerge from such commitment.

American Preaching: Word, Performance, and Media
REL 401-C / REL 532-R (Spring 2018)
Indiana University
MW 4:00 – 5:15
Professor M. Cooper Harriss
Office: 207 Sycamore Hall / email: charriss@indiana.edu
Office Hours: TBA

Introduction and Aims:

A provocation: There is no more significant historical influence on the development of American language and literature, political oratory, musical/entertainment style, and the refinement of media and technology – all of which is to say “American culture” – than preachers and their preaching. This course begins with a brief historical overview of the diversity of American preaching and some primary cultural and theoretical concerns before tracing its contributions to presumably “secular” culture considered in three categories: word (literature, rhetoric, and authority), performance (music, oratory, symbolic action, embodiment, affect), and media (pamphlets, radio, television, Internet, and other technologies). In the process we’ll consider religious dimensions of cultural production, questions of authority and identity, phenomenologies of charisma and emotion, and the critical possibilities for theology, homiletics, and other confessional “data” within the study of religion and culture.

Expectations:

I expect you to come to class regularly, prepared (and in possession of class materials), well versed in the assigned text(s), and ready to participate in vigorous discussion with your classmates and me. I would like for you to be good participants (which means both listening as well as you contribute, and contributing as well as you listen). You should feel free to take intellectual risks in the classroom and in your assignments, yet you should also be rigorous in doing so in order that your creativity finds conscientious support. I will push you, respectfully, on your answers and assumptions – both in class and in my assessments of your writing. I hope that you’ll feel free to do so courteously (yet no less strenuously) with one another and welcome you to hold me to the same standard.

Course Materials: N.B. *Items are available through the IU Bookstore. Better prices may be found elsewhere but be certain that materials are available in time for your preparations and that they are the same edition listed below and in the online course system.*

Ralph Ellison, *Juneteenth* (Vintage)

Rev. Johnny L. Jones, *The Hurricane that Hit Atlanta* – 2CD set (Dust to Digital)

Russell Rathbun, *Post-Rapture Radio* (Jossey-Bass)

Matthew Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Harvard)

Schedule of Meetings:

(Assignments marked with an asterisk (*) are available through the course Canvas page)

January 8: Introductions – Zora Neale Hurston Letter to James Weldon Johnson; Exchange between Michael Warner and Edmund Morgan (*NY Review of Books*)*; selected videos (in class)

January 10: N. Hawthorne, “The Minister’s Black Veil”*; James Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook”*;

January 15: MLK Holiday

January 17: Historical overview of American preaching; In-class introduction to semester preacher project

WORD

January 22: *Juneteenth*, chapters 1-4; Cleophus J. LaRue, “The Search for Distinctiveness in Black Preaching,” from *The Heart of Black Preaching**; James Weldon Johnson, Foreword to *God’s Trombones* and “The Creation”*

January 24: *Juneteenth* chapters 5-7; Kenneth Burke, “On Words and the Word,” *Rhetoric of Religion* (excerpt)*

January 29: *Juneteenth* chapters 8-9; From *Autobiography of Jarena Lee**; Sermons from *God Struck Me Dead**

January 31: *Juneteenth* chapters 10-14; A. Lincoln, Gettysburg Address and 2nd Inaugural*;

February 5: *Juneteenth* chapters 15-end; Toni Morrison, “Comment” [“Bill Clinton: The First Black President”]*

February 7: In-class checkup on preacher project: Who, where, when, why, and how?

PERFORMANCE

February 12: Zora Neale Hurston, from *Mules and Men* and *the Sanctified Church**; Bernard “Mississippi” Mitchell, “I am the Unexpected”*; Sandra Gustafson, “Gender in Performance”; readings in gesture, charisma, and affect*

February 14: Richard Lischer, “Strategies of Style,” from *The Preacher King**; MLK text and video*

February 19: Richard Lischer, “Masks of Character,” from *The Preacher King**; MLK text and video*

February 21: James Brown from the *TAMI SHOW*; *James Brown Live at the Boston Garden, 1968*; James Brown sequence in *Blues Brothers*

February 26: Harry Stout, “American Awakener” (from *Divine Dramatist*)*; Whitefield Sermons*

February 21: “The Big Tent,” *New Yorker* on Billy Graham*; Crusade videos*

March 5: *The Eyes of Tammy Faye* (film)

March 7: In-class checkup on preacher project (An account of the performance)

SPRING BREAK

MEDIA

March 19: *Aimee Semple McPherson* Prologue-Chapter 2;

March 21: *Aimee Semple McPherson* Chapters 3-4

March 26: *Aimee Semple McPherson* Chapters 5-6; Lerone Martin, "Selling to the Souls of Black Folk"*; Rev. JM Gates, "Black Diamond Express"

March 28: No meeting

April 2: *Aimee Semple McPherson* Chapters 7-8; *Hurricane that Hit Atlanta* (listen for class intro)

April 4: *Aimee Semple McPherson* finish it; *Hurricane that Hit Atlanta* (listen more/closely for deeper discussion/comparison)

April 9: *Post-Rapture Radio*

April 11: *Post-Rapture Radio*

Class Dinner: Chez Harriss (TBA)

April 16: *Post-Rapture Radio*

April 18: Loose Ends

April 23: Grad mini-conference / UG preacher project presentations

April 25: UG preacher project presentations

May 4: Final Projects/Papers due by Noon

Assignments:

- 1) Regular Reading Responses:** By 2:30pm before every class meeting you should submit a brief (roughly 200 word) reading response to the "Discussion" section of the class Canvas site. There is no set question. Responses may address any aspect of the reading; I simply ask that you offer some sense of how you respond to the reading – 1) A thesis or main idea that you want to formulate and air ahead of time to your classmates and me, 2) You may choose to look closely at a passel of text with a bigger idea in mind, 3) You should always conclude with a question (or several questions) that you would like to raise or address in class. I might choose one or two of these for discussion, or you are certainly free to raise them on your own. Do take the opportunity to look over others' responses before class begins, and it is definitely acceptable to respond to one another. I grade these on a credit/no credit basis. No response (or an unsatisfactory response – i.e., habitually too short, vague, etc.) means no credit. I'll be in contact via email in the early weeks of the term to affirm or guide the degree to which your responses are sufficient.
- 2) Preacher Project:** This is a semester-long project that students will complete in stages. Students will invent a preacher, offering biographical details (timeframe,

geographical location, religious orientation, matters of identity such as race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.) and shall create a primary document (a sermon, a radio broadcast/podcast, a letter, etc.) that reflects this preacher's biography. Later, students shall create a secondary source (a mock-journal entry from an observer/participant, a crime report, a documentary, etc.) that describes and contextualizes this preacher's performance. Finally, students will produce an account (a historical or biographical reflection) that addresses his or her lasting legacies (including innovations, uses of media, etc.) and significance in both the history of preaching and in American culture. See the course schedule above for individual due dates and the grading scheme below for distributions. I've scheduled "check-in" days where students will offer brief presentations of their progress.

Grading:

Reading Responses: 25%

Preacher projects: 75% (subdivided)

First check-in (Who What, When, etc.): 20%

Second check in (Performance account): 25%

Final submission (includes technology and legacy): 30%

Attendance:

We are a small enough class that you really need to prioritize attending. Your absence will be felt and it will hurt our class dynamic if folks are regularly absent. I do understand that life is unpredictable, so you may miss class once without excuse. Other instances (illness, emergencies, etc.) we can take case-by-case. If something is planned ahead of time, DO LET ME KNOW AHEAD OF TIME. If you are sick and cannot attend, please email me as soon as it is humanly possible. Unexcused absences (see <http://college.indiana.edu/ado/policies.shtml> for what qualifies as excusable) may incur a penalty of up to 1.5 points per offense.

Academic Integrity: As a student at IU, you are expected to adhere to the standards and policies detailed in the *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct (Code)*. When you submit an assignment with your name on it, you are signifying that the work contained therein is all yours, unless otherwise cited or referenced. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged. If you are unsure about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or exam, be sure to seek clarification beforehand. All suspected violations of the *Code* will be handled according to University policies. Sanctions for academic misconduct may include a failing grade on the assignment, reduction in your final course grade, a failing grade in the course, among other possibilities, and must include a report to the Dean of Students who may impose additional disciplinary sanctions.

Graduate Component (R-532):

In addition to regular attendance, reading responses, and participation in ordinary class meetings, graduate students will meet with Prof. Harriss roughly a half-dozen times

during the semester to reflect more deeply on course material as well as read and discuss the following books:

Catherine Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (UNC)

Claude Andrew Clegg, III, *The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (UNC)

Harold Frederic, *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (Penguin)

Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, and Popular Culture in America* (UNC)

Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (NYU)

Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans)

Graduate students will write a term paper and participate in a mini-conference, presenting a 15-18-minute version of their paper, in the last week of class. They must send me a 250-word conference proposal for their paper, present a short version of it to the entire class as they would a conference paper, and field Q&A. The expanded term paper is then due at the end of term (May 4).