**Religions in the United States**Brad Stoddard, McDaniel College

**Course Description**

A wide-ranging examination of the diverse religious life of the United States both in history and today. Attention is given to religion among native/First Nations peoples, mainstream groups such as Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism, marginal movements such as Scientology and other new religious movements, and religions among recent immigrants. The course will look at the history of religions in the United States, themes that have characterized U.S. religions, and case studies drawn from religious practice in the United States.

**Learning Objectives**

* Students will learn a more nuanced view of American religious history.
* Students will learn dominant trends in American religious history.
* Students will learn the political and socio-cultural factors that drive the changing theological climates.
* Students will explore the politics of telling different versions of American religious history.

**Required Course Materials**

1. R. Marie Griffith, *American Religions: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
2. John Corrigan and Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
3. Other material posted online.

**Grading Policy**

In this course the following grading format will be used:

A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-:70-72; D+:68-69; D: 63-67; D-: 60-62; F: below 60.

**Course Requirements**  
Reading Quizzes 10% Critical Book Review 15%   
“Center” Project 15%Midterm 30% Final 30%

*Reading Quizzes*   
To ensure that every student completes the assigned readings, we will occasionally begin class with a reading quiz. There is no predetermined number of quizzes, nor will there be any warning that we are having a quiz.

*Critical Book Review*

Students will write one critical book review (4-5 pages). Students will choose one book on American religious history and then critically evaluate the text’s contribution to scholarship, the argument, and the author’s selection and use of data to prove the thesis. Additional instructions will follow.

*“Center” Project*

As we discuss the first week of class, the telling of history has political implications. Not only do people tell different versions of history, but histories typically reflect the biases of the people who write them. The telling of American religious history is no exception. For this assignment, in 4-5 pages, students will abandon **responsible** scholarship and construct a history that places a particular group at the “center” of American religious history. This history is rooted in the histories we learn in class and in class readings; however, each student should selectively emphasize the history that “fits” the student’s narrative. Students will add an additional page that identifies the history that would undermine the argument you made in the previous 4-5 pages. Additional instructions will follow.

*Exams* (Midterm and Final)  
This course includes a midterm and a final exam. The exams may include multiple choice, matching, short essays, long essays, and fill-in-the-blank questions.

**Class Schedule**

(JC) = *Religion in America*, by John Corrigan and Winthrop S. Hudson

(RMG) = *American Religions: A Documentary History*, by R. Marie Griffith

**Week one**

1. Intro  
   Reading: None
2. Narratives of American Religious History part I

Reading: Excerpts from Religion in America by Robert Baird

1. Narratives of American Religious History part II

Reading: Excerpts from Sydney Ahlstrom by Sydney Ahlstrom  
Reading: (JC) “Introduction”

**Week two**

1. Native Americans  
   Reading: (JC) Ch. 1, pages 21-33
2. Colonial Catholics in North America   
   Reading: (JC) pages 33-36, 37-54
3. Puritans  
   Reading: (RMG) John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity”; and Anne Bradstreet, “To My Dear Children” and “TO My Dear and Loving Husband”   
   Reading: (JC) pages 56-62, 79-81

**Week three**

1. Colonial Atlantic  
   Reading: (RMG) William Penn, “Letter to the Indians”; Roger Williams, “Letter to the Town of Providence…”  
   Reading: (JC) pages 72-78, 81-83, 90-96
2. First Great Awakening and American Evangelicalism   
   Reading: (RMG) Jonathan Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival…”  
   Reading: (JC) pages 109-121
3. The New Republic and State Constitutions   
   Reading: (RMG) Thomas Jefferson, “A Bill for Establishing…”; and James Madison, “Memorial and Remonstrance…”  
   Reading: (JC) pages 134-137, 141-143, and 147-152

**Week four**

1. American Civic Engagement: Prison Reform

Reading: Excerpts from Prison Discipline Society’s First Annual Report

Reading: (RMG) “From *Democracy in America*” by Alexis De Tocqueville

1. Slavery and Slave Religion  
   Reading: Henry Bibb, “Conjuration and Witchcraft”   
   Reading: (JC) pages 152-156
2. Second Great Awakening   
   Reading: (RMG) Charles Grandison Finney, “Memoirs”  
   Reading: (JC) pages 180-19

**Week five**

1. Mormons, *Reynolds v. U.S.*, and Religious Freedom  
   Reading: (RMG) Joseph Smith, “The Articles of Faith” and “Revelation”   
   Reading: (JC) pages 252-255 and 269-270
2. Utopian Communities  
   Reading: (JC) pages 243-252 and 255-259
3. Transcendentalists/Unitarians  
   Reading: (RMG) Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Harvard Divinity School Address”   
   Reading: (JC) 209-212 and 233-235

**Week six**

1. Catholics in the 1800s  
   Reading: (JC) pages 307-32
2. The Bible, Slavery, and Abolitionism  
   Reading: (RMG) Jarena Lee, “The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee”, Frederick Douglass, “Narrative of the Life…”; George Dodd Armstrong, “The Christian Doctrine of Slavery”; and Catherine E. Beecher, “Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism”   
   Reading: (JC) 213-220, 288-293
3. Black Christianity  
   Reading: (RMG) W. E. B. DuBois, “The Sorrow Songs,” “Credo,” and “A Litany of Atlanta”  
   Reading: (JC) pages 213-220, 288-293

**CBR Due**

**Week seven**

1. The Civil War  
   Reading: (JC) pages 277-288
2. Native Americans and the Ghost Dance  
   Reading: (RMG) Black Elk, “Black Elk Speaks…”  
   Reading: (JC) pages 296-298
3. Midterm  
   Reading: None

**Week eight**

1. Religious Pluralism and Liberal Christianity  
   Reading: (RMG) Swami Vivekananda, “*Hinduism as a Religion* and *Farewell*”  
   Reading: (JC) pages 333-345
2. Social Gospel and the Gospel of Wealth  
   Reading: (RMG) Russell Herman Conwell, “Acres of Diamonds”; and Walter Rauschenbusch, “A Theology for the Social Gospel”  
   Reading: (JC) pages 383-393
3. American Judaisms   
   Reading: (RMG) “Pittsburgh Platform”   
   Reading: (JC) pages 229-232 and 409-418

**Week nine**

1. Fundamentalism and Pentecostals  
   Reading: (RMG) Harry Emerson Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win”  
   Reading: (JC) pages 423-432
2. African Americans, Religious Innovation, and the Harlem Renaissance  
   Reading: Judith Weisenfeld, “Introduction” to *New World A-Coming*
3. The Cold War: One Nation Under God  
   Reading: (RMG) Will Herberg, “Protestant-Catholic-Jew”  
   Reading: (JC) pages 479-485

**Week ten**

1. Religion and Law: The Scopes Monkey Trial, the 1940s, and the 1960s

Reading: *Engle v. Vitale* and *Abington v. Schempp*

1. The Cold War: One Nation Under God  
   Reading: (RMG) Will Herberg, “Protestant-Catholic-Jew”  
   Reading: (JC) pages 479-485
2. Religion and Law: The Scopes Monkey Trials, the 1940s, and the 1960s

Reading: *Engle v. Vitale* and *Abington v. Schempp*

**Week eleven**

1. 1965 Immigration Act, the 1960s Counter Culture, Asian Religion, and New Religious Movements  
   Reading: (JC) pages 464-476
2. Jim Jones and Jonestown

Reading: Brad Stoddard, “Peoples Temple” (from *Race and New Religious Movements in the USA: A Documentary Reader)*

1. African Americans and Islam  
   Internet: Malcolm X, “[Police Brutality Speech](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_uYWDyYNUg)”  
   Reading: (RMG) Malcolm X, “Letters from Abroad”   
   Reading: (JC) 454-463

**Week twelve**

1. MLK and the Civil Rights Movements  
   Reading: (RMG) Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

Reading: (JC) pages 485-489

1. American Catholics after the 1960s

Reading: (JC) pages 517-525 and 526-531

Reading: *Humanae Vitae*

1. Religious Right  
   Reading: (JC) pages 503-507 and 510-517

**Week thirteen**

1. Religious Rights: *Employment Division v. Smith*, RFRA, and RLUIPA

Reading: (JC) 548-552

Reading: Religious Freedom Restoration Act

1. Faith-Based Initiatives

Reading: Excerpts from *The Quiet Revolution* by The White House (read Executive Summary and pages 1-3 in chapter 1

1. 9/11  
   Reading: (RMG) Franklin Graham, “The Name”; and “Letter to Franklin Graham from the Council on American-Islamic Relations”   
   Reading: (JC) pages 544-548

**Week fourteen**

1. “Nones,” Millennials, and Generation Z  
   Reading: (JC) pages 537-541, 564-565  
   Reading: Pew Research Center, “Nones on the Rise,” pages 9-12
2. Sexuality, Gay Marriage, LGBTQ Rights, and the Law  
   Reading: (JC) pages 552-556  
   Reading: Patrick Cheng, “Introduction” to *Radical Love*
3. Evangelicals and Trump

Internet: “[White Evangelicals are the only Religious Group to Support Trump](https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/10/3/17929696/white-evangelicals-prri-poll-trump-presidency-support)”

Internet: “[Why Trump Reigns as King Cyrus](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/31/opinion/trump-evangelicals-cyrus-king.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage)”

**“Center” Paper Due**