**Institutional Context**

I teach in a History, Philosophy, and Religious Studies department at North Dakota State University. The history section offers an MA and Ph.D. Faculty are regularly reminded that the institution is “distinctive as a student-focused, land-grant, research university,” meaning that we are encouraged to explain how our research and teaching will benefit the state of North Dakota. The university has approximately 12,500 students and primarily serves students from North Dakota and Minnesota. 82% of the student body identifies as white, non-Hispanic.

A large majority of students come from Lutheran or Catholic backgrounds, though a fair number confess to be the quintessential “none.” Each class has a couple seriously committed Catholics and evangelicals. The former are usually knowledgeable about their religion, and the school has one of the most active Newman Centers in the Midwest. Most students are open-minded and want to learn. The average student has acceptable writing skills but needs significant improvement with critical thinking skills.

**Curricular Context**

We only have a handful of Religious Studies minors and do not offer a major in the field, so this, like most of my courses, is cross-listed with history and meets general education requirements for humanities and cultural or global diversity. I am 1 of 1.6 faculty members in religious studies, which means I teach most everything—Global Islam, History of Christianity, New Religious Movements, New Testament, World Religions, Theory & Methods, a WWII study abroad program, etc. This course and Religion & Politics are the only two in my research area. World Religions is taught every year; the others rotate every other year.

Like all of my courses, this is likely to be the only religious studies course a student at NDSU takes, so I want to teach material and skills that students can connect with and will use well beyond the classroom. I choose assignments that make students apply critical thinking to their own experiences and reflect on their place within a diverse world.

**Course Background**

I originally taught this course in four achronological sections: Church & State using traditional textual primary sources; Immigration using material culture and visual theory; Evangelicalism & Fundamentalism using ethnographic sources that modeled the mini-ethnographic history papers they were writing; and a wild card category that used a monograph grappling with race, gender, or whatever else floated my boat at the moment. My plan was to sneak in various methodological approaches without students (theoretically) realizing that they’d practiced multiple methodologies until being presented with their success. My assignments still reflect these varied methodological approaches, and we discuss that fact in class, but the division of the class into discrete topical and methodological units seemed ultimately unnecessary.

The course organization still leans toward themes rather than chronology. Currently, my objective is to offer a variety of narratives of American religious history through the eyes of different religious and ethnic groups. As a result, a portion of the course resembles a world religions class, but the idea is to continually retell a story with significant variations. I don’t use a textbook throughout the course because I don’t want students to accept it as the “true” story.

The course has around 30 students.

**RELS/HIST 270:**

**American Religious History**



Fall 2021, 3 credits

Professor Anne M. Blankenship, Minard 422R

anne.blankenship@ndsu.edu

Office hours: Tuesday, 11-12:15; by appt.

**Course Description**

*Introduction to the basic issues in American history including the study of Puritans, immigration, church and state, revivalism, civil and military religion, apocalypticism, and new age religion.*

We will dig beyond rituals and doctrine to discover the roles religion plays in the lives of Americans. Moving roughly chronologically, the class will give particular attention to race, immigration, and pluralism in American religion. We’ll wrestle over the meaning of religious liberty and different understandings of the separation of church and state. We will experiment with textual and visual analysis and ethnography to see what these methodological approaches offer us as scholars. Class periods will be filled with a mixture of discussion, short videos, group activities, lectures, and student presentations as we learn about new and old religious traditions in America.

**Objectives**

By the end of term, students will be able to:

• Outline historical developments in American Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism.

• Debate the historical and contemporary complexities of religious liberty in the U.S.

• Evaluate the ways in which news media engages religious issues.

• Better understand how some Americans felt (and feel) about their religion and its role within the United States.

• Analyze a variety of images and documents to determine their historical and cultural significance, clarify the role of material culture in religious practice, and differentiate between confessional and academic statements.

**Required Texts**

Rachel Calof, *Rachel Calof’s Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains*

(available online through NDSU’s library)

Stephen Stein, *Communities of Dissent: A History of Alternative Religions in America*

**Strongly Recommended Text**

Steven Waldman, *Sacred Liberty: America’s Long, Bloody, and Ongoing Struggle for Religious*

*Freedom* Ebook available for \*free\* at Fargo Public Library via Hoopla

**Requirements & Grading**

Participation, Quizzes, & Short Assignments 25%

Current Event 5%

Debate (and related paper) 10%

Ethnographic Research Paper 30%

Midterm 15%

Final Exam 15%

*Participation, Quizzes, & Short Assignments*

This part of your grade relies on your contributions to discussion, quizzes, group activities, and short at-home or in-class assignments. Being physically present without actively participating is insufficient. Please let me know as soon as possible if you will be missing class. Official excused absences are, of course, excused and I will overlook two additional absences (for sickness, a day of rest, whatever—use them wisely) during the semester. Subsequent absences will decrease your final grade by .5% per day missed. Three tardies = one absence.

*Current Event*

Most classes will begin with the presentation of a news article. Any event or news relevant to religion in America is acceptable. These articles can come from daily newspapers, such as *The New York Times, The Guardian,* or *The Washington Post*, or the [Religious News Service](http://religionnews.com/category/news/)*.* Articles from Yahoo, MSN, and the like rarely provide enough context for this assignment. The source should not be affiliated with a particular religion or be based primarily on the author’s opinion.Upload a 1-2-page paper and a link to the article to Blackboard by 8pm the day preceding your presentation. Your presentation and paper should 1) briefly summarize the article; 2) explain the event’s significance; and 3) provide any historical or religious background necessary to understand the story. You will choose a presentation date during the first week of class.

*Debates*

 The class will participate in formal debates on questions of religious liberty in American during Week Four. A template of the debate format and research guides for each topic are available on Blackboard. You will develop your arguments and counterarguments in small debate teams; each team member must participate in planning the debate, writing arguments, and orally debating the issues in class. Everyone will also write a one-page position paper for the debate in which they are not actively participating.

*Ethnographic Research Paper*

 This 6-8 page paper will blend data from ethnographic field work at a local place of worship with secondary historical research on that religion/denomination/congregation/organziation. A string of deadlines will break the assignment into smaller parts: You must choose a place of worship and meet with the professor **by** **September 24th**, compile a short bibliography and research plan (**due** **October 1st**), submit field notes based on three or more site visits (visiting more than three times will earn you extra credit) (**due** **November 16th**), and complete a full draft of your paper for classmates to review (**due** **November 30th**) before submitting the final draft (**due** **December 7th**).Instructions for each of these components will be discussed in class and are available on Blackboard. Your paper will place the group within the larger context of American religious history, so you will need to conduct secondary research on that religious tradition and its history in America.

**Expectations**

The reading for each day should be completed before you come to class. Please read for comprehension. Feel free to interrupt lectures or discussions any time a question arises.

Hard copies of each assignment are due in class on the day they appear on the syllabus unless otherwise noted. Written assignments should be double-spaced and use 12-point font with 1” margins (double-sided printing encouraged). Late assignments will lose 5% every 24 hours or part thereof. A greater penalty will apply to the final paper. Extra credit may be available to students who complete all major assignments. All late assignments and extra credit must be submitted by the final day of class.

Any students with disabilities or other special needs who require special accommodations in this course are encouraged to share these concerns or requests with the instructor and contact the [Disability Services Office](https://www.ndsu.edu/disabilityservices/).

Everyone comes to this class with different religious experiences, both positive and negative, and many students hold strong religious beliefs. I ask that you keep an open mind to the history of your tradition and those of others. Exploring how and why people do and believe certain things is the point of this class. Whether you find a particular practice or belief surprising, offensive, humorous, or true, remind yourself that you don’t know the religious beliefs of everyone in the class and phrase your comments accordingly—don’t say anything you couldn’t say respectfully to someone of that tradition. Learning to talk respectfully about and with people you disagree is part of your college education and essential to a course in religious studies where sensitive topics regularly arise. If you have personal experiences with or within a tradition, I hope you will feel comfortable, but not pressured, to share with the rest of the class.

**COVID-19 Health and Safety Precautions**

As of August 23, 2021, NDSU policy states that **face** **masks are required in the classroom, regardless of vaccination status**. They must be worn properly, covering both the mouth and the nose for the entirety of the class. Failure to comply is a violation of Academic Responsibility and Conduct Code, with all the attendant repercussions. Students who cannot wear a face covering due to a medical condition or disability may seek accommodation through Disability Services (701-231-8463).

 Additionally, NDSU policy states that professors have the responsibility to determine what, if any, safety practices beyond those stipulated by the university should be required in their classrooms. This class will follow CDC guidance, which may exceed the university-wide restrictions later in the term.

If you test positive for COVID-19, have any symptoms of COVID-19, or feel sick, you should quarantine at home according to North Dakota guidelines. Contact me to talk about accommodations that prioritize your health and that of the campus community while still being able to complete the course.

**Academic Honesty**

The academic community operates on honesty, integrity, and fair play. [NDSU Policy 335](https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/policy/335.pdf): Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct applies to cases in which cheating, plagiarism, or other academic misconduct has occurred in an instructional context. Students found guilty of academic misconduct are subject to penalties up to and possibly including suspension and/or expulsion. Resources on academic honesty can be found at [www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty](http://www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty).

In other words, don’t cheat. I don’t care which type of citation you use as long as you use one consistently and include page numbers; parenthetical citations or footnotes are both acceptable. Any facts, words, or ideas that you find online, in our textbooks, from a friend, or in other resources must be cited. Citing class lectures (title, date) helpfully clarifies where you obtained information. If you have questions, look at these [citation guidelines](http://www2.lib.unc.edu/instruct/citations/index.html?section=why_we_cite) or ask the professor for help. If in doubt, cite it. Plagiarism will result in 0% for the assignment or exam and my extreme disappointment and displeasure.

**Course Schedule**

**Week One:** Native American Religious Traditions

Tuesday: Introductions

Thursday: Read Suzanne Crawford O’Brien, “Salmon as Sacrament: First Salmon Ceremonies in

the Pacific Northwest,” in *Religion, Food, and Eating in North America*

Listen to “[You might be done with religion, but religion is not done with you](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/you-might-be-done-with-religion-but-religion-is-not/id1494843031?i=1000469489124),” *Keeping it 101: A Killjoy’s Introduction to Religion* podcast (43 minutes)

\*\*Friday, August 27th: Short Assignment Due: Write a reflection paper (2 pgs) narrating your

religious history (it can be about you, your parents, ancestors, etc). This is not an invasion of your privacy but rather an opportunity to place yourself in a historical religious context. You do not have to share your personal beliefs but consider why your family identifies with a particular religion or none at all. *If you don’t know, ask relatives.* Upload paper to Blackboard by midnight.

Recommended: Waldman, *Sacred Liberty,* Chapter One

**Week Two:** European Colonization of North America

\*\*Tuesday, August 31st: Short assignment due in class: Complete the Religion & State reading

questions (on Blackboard under Assignments) based on the Requerimiento, the Maryland Toleration Act, and the Religious Tolerance section of the Iroquois Constitution. If you have time, please read the preface and introduction to Stein’s *Communities of Dissent* as well

Thursday: Read John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity”

Questions to think about: As you read Winthrop’s sermon, think about how his audience and purpose shaped what he wrote. What was his central purpose? How did Winthrop understand his community’s relationship with God? How did Puritan priorities for the New World vary from those of Roman Catholics?

**Week Three:** Dissent and Revolution

\*\*Tuesday: Short Assignment: Based on Stein, Chapters 1 and 2, complete a Dissent in Colonial

America chart. Bring hardcopy to class.

Thursday: Read Benjamin Franklin on Religion; Thomas Jefferson, Draft for a Bill for

Establishing Religious Freedom

Questions to think about: How do Franklin and Jefferson think about religion in comparison to the other groups we have studied? Why do you think these new ideas became popular at this time? How does Franklin explain his religious choice? Does Jefferson use the same reasoning? Some people argue(d) that deists and atheists lack morality without the belief in divine revelation. How does Franklin address this concern?

 Recommended: Waldman, *Sacred Liberty*, Chapters Two & Three; Carla Pestana, “The City

upon a Hill under Siege: The Puritan Perception of the Quaker Threat to Massachusetts Bay, 1656-1661”

**Week Four:** Religious Liberty Debates 1 & 2

\*\*Position Paper: Write a one-page argument in favor of the affirmative or negative position for the topic you are NOT debating. Due on the day of that debate.

Tuesday: Read [Jenna Weissman Joselit, “Breaking the Ten Commandments](http://religionandpolitics.org/2017/08/01/breaking-the-ten-commandments-a-short-history-of-the-contentious-american-monuments/): A Short History of the

Contentious American Monument,” *Religion & Politics* (August 2017); [Scott Bomboy, “Supreme Court Gets a Ten Commandments Appeal from New Mexico,”](https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/supreme-court-gets-a-ten-commandments-appeal-from-new-mexico) *Constitution Daily* (July 2017).

Debate One: North Dakota’s [new law](https://www.legis.nd.gov/assembly/67-2021/documents/21-0952-04000.pdf) permitting the display of the 10 Commandments in

public school classrooms is constitutional.

Thursday: Read excerpt from [*People v. Woody*](https://scocal.stanford.edu/opinion/people-v-woody-24460)

Debate Two: Native Americans have a constitutional right to use peyote (a Schedule I illegal

drug) in religious practices.

 Recommended: Waldman, *Sacred Liberty*, Chapters Six, Eight, & Twelve

**Week Five:** Second Great Awakening

Tuesday: Read Stein, Chapters 3 and 4

Thursday: Read Stein 87-104

 \*\*Must meet with professor regarding final project by Friday, September 24th

Recommended: Waldman, *Sacred Liberty*, Chapters Seven & Ten

**Week Six:** African American Religious Traditions & Slavery

Tuesday: Read primary documents on slavery and Christianity and Eugene & Elizabeth Genovese,

“Slaveholders and the Bible”

\*\*Short Assignment: How did both abolitionists and slave owners use religion and the

Bible to support their cause? Make a list containing the central points made by each side. Circle the greatest strengths of each side. (bring to class, handwritten okay)

Thursday: Read the assigned primary text ([*Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*](http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibb/bibb.html)

OR [*Narrative of Henry Box Brown*](http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/boxbrown/boxbrown.html) OR [*The Narrative of Bethany Veney, a Slave Woman*](http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/veney/veney.html) OR [*Memoir of Chloe Spear*](http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brownrw/menu.html)) and be prepared to share these stories with the class. In small groups, you will introduce the author of the narrative you read and explain the role that religion played in his or her life. While each narrative may not include all of the following, look for: ritual (baptism, marriages, funerals), holidays (Christmas, Sabbath observance), attitudes toward the Bible or the biblical Israelites, Christian condemnation and/or enforcement of slavery, worship services, slave owners’ use of religion, conversion, the afterlife, black preachers and prayer meetings, etc. Take careful notes or annotate the text as you will be expected to cite specific detail and use quotations.

\*\*Friday, October 1st: Bibliography and research plan due, upload to Blackboard by midnight

Recommended: Waldman, *Sacred Liberty*, Chapter Five; Bertram Korn, “The Rabbis and the Slavery Question”

**Week Seven:** Religion & Civil Rights

Tuesday: Read Charles Marsh, *God’s Long Summer*, “Mrs. Hamer’s Fight for Freedom”

Thursday: Read Marsh, *God’s Long Summer,* “The Calling of Sam Bowers”

**Week Eight:** Westward Expansion

\*\*Tuesday, October 10th: Midterm

Thursday: REMOTE CLASS: NO IN-CLASS MEETING (YSAR!)

Read selections from *Letters from the Promised Land: Swedes in America* and the WPA

interviews with Mary Juma & Mike Abdallah (1939); begin *Rachel Calof’s Story.*

Review Lutherans in America PowerPoint (download so you can read notes and slides).

Watch [Lutheran Roots in America](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXF9Z-0QhoQ) (produced by Lutherans but objective)

Submit Lutherans in America worksheet by midnight Friday.

Recommended: L. DeAne Lagerquist, “The Lutheran Difference: What More than Nice?”

**Week Nine:** Jewish Immigration

Tue: Finish *Rachel Calof’s Story*

\*\*Short Assignment: List at least three ways in which life on the frontier challenged Calof’s *religious* beliefs and practices and explain how the family adapted in each case.

In class reading: “Memorial to the President and Members of the Adjunta of KKBE” (December 23, 1824) & Pittsburgh Platform

Thur:\*\*Group Presentation: Each group will read a different article on Jewish nostalgia and material

culture and teach the material to the class. You will need to share images from the article or related artifacts to the class.

Recommended: Waldman, *Sacred Liberty,* Chapter Eleven

**Week Ten:** Roman Catholic Immigration

Tuesday: Read George Johnson, “The Commission on American Citizenship of the Catholic

University of America,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* (1943) and browse through at least three issues of the [Treasure Chest of Fun and Fact](http://cuislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/cuislandora%3A9584)comic book from different years.

\*\*Short Assignment due in class: Complete worksheet on Catholic citizenship

Thursday: Read selection from Brett Hoover, *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the*

*Future of U.S. Catholicism* (2014)

Questions to think about: What were the major Catholic ethnic groups of the 19th

century and to what degree did they integrate within American society? What are the challenges of having a bifurcated parish like Hoover describes? Did each ethnic group have equal resources and authority within the church?

Recommended: Waldman, *Sacred Liberty,* Chapters Four, Nine, & Fourteen; Jay Dolan,

“A Different Breed of Catholics”

**Week Eleven:** Evangelicism

Tuesday: Read R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters*, Introduction; Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the*

*Glory*,Prologue

Thursday: Grant Wacker, “Billy Graham’s 1949 Los Angeles Revival”

Recommended: Waldman, *Sacred Liberty,* Chapter Fifteen

**Week Twelve:** Islam

Tuesday: JoAnn D’Alisera, *An Imagined Geography: Sierra Leonean Muslims in America*, “I ♥

Islam”

Thursday: Jamillah Karim, *American Muslim Women*, “Negotiating an American Muslim Identity

after September 11”

\*\*Extra Credit: Watch [*New Muslim Cool*](https://tubitv.com/movies/15640/new_muslim_cool)and complete associated worksheet (on Blackboard). Due by midnight, Sunday, November 14th.

Recommended: Waldman, *Sacred Liberty,* Sixteen & Seventeen; Raymond Brady Williams, “Religion and Recent Immigrants [in the Midwest]: New Ferment in American Civic Life”

**Week Thirteen:** Buddhism

Tuesday: Read Bunyu Fujimura, selections from *Though I be Crushed*

\*\*November 16th, Field notes due in class

Thursday: Read Beat Generation texts on Buddhism: Timothy Leary’s “The Buddha as Drop-Out”

and Gary Snyder’s “Smokey the Bear Sutra”

Recommended: Waldman, *Sacred Liberty*, Chapter Thirteen

**Week Fourteen:** No class!

Tuesday: NO CLASS

\*\*Your professor is attending the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in San Antonio this week. In lieu of class attendance and reading assignments, you must complete the following assignment and upload it to Blackboard by midnight on **Sunday, November 28th**.

Write a 2-3-page analysis of a documentary. Describe the film’s content in a half page and spend the rest of your paper reflecting on its agenda, objectivity, and presentation. Did the filmmakers have a specific agenda or was the material presented in a balanced manner? How did they accomplish this? What were the documentary’s greatest strengths and weaknesses? How might it have been more effective? What new questions did it raise? Did it provide sufficient context to understand multiple perspectives on the topic? How did it contribute to your understanding of religion in America?

You may choose from the following documentaries: *Fremont, CA* (2009), *Blue Collar & Buddha* (1986), *Jesus Camp* (2006), *Get the Fire! Young Mormon Missionaries Abroad* (2003), *Shaolin Ulysses: Kung Fu Monks in America* (2004), *Allah Made Me Funny* (2008), *Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam* (2004), *Four Seasons Lodge* (2008), *A Life Apart: Hasidism in America* (1997), *Divided We Fall:* *Americans in the Aftermath* (2008), *Beats of the Heart: Chase the Devil—Religious Music of the Appalachian Mountains* (1983), *American Jesus* (2013), *Devil’s Playground* (2002), *For the Bible Tells Me So* (2007), *Hell House* (2001), *Friends of God* (2006), *Knocking* (2006), *Let the Church Say Amen* (2004), *Rejoice and Shout* (2010), *Waiting for Armageddon* (2009), *Welcome to Amish America* (2004), *Witnesses of Jehovah* (1988), *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief* (2015), *Sukkah City* (2013), *Trembling before G-d* (2001), *Bible Quiz* (2013)

Thursday: Happy Thanksgiving!

**Week Fifteen:** Hinduism

\*\*Tuesday, November 30th: Rough draft of Ethnographic Research Paper due in class. Please bring

two *printed* copies for your peers to critique.

Thursday: Read Stephen Prothero, “Hinduphobia and Hinduphilia”

**(Dead) Week Sixteen:** Civil Religion

Tuesday: Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”

\*\*Thursday, Ethnographic Research Papers due

**\*\*Final Exam: Monday, December 13th at 1pm**