

Matthew A. Sutton
Assistant Professor of History
Washington State University

Course Title: Religion and American Culture

History of This Course: This course essentially grew out of two different courses that I have offered in the past: “History of U.S. Religions,” and “Religion, Politics, and American Culture.” Because I will not be able to offer both courses on a regular basis at WSU, I have decided to combine them into a single new course entitled “Religion and American Culture.”

Teaching Philosophy: As I develop my courses, my objective is to teach students to think critically about the past and analyze how history informs the present, especially with regard to issues of race, class, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. To convey this objective, I have developed a number of strategies. First, I expose students to myriad primary sources. I believe that it is essential for them to do historical analysis themselves rather than to rely on others’ interpretations of data, which builds their confidence and allows them to engage with class materials. Second, I encourage students to think critically. I often introduce controversial issues, and occasionally play “devil’s advocate,” challenging them to see issues from all sides. In this era of globalization, students must be able to see historical events from multiple perspectives. Cultivating an environment open to lively discussions and debates encourages students to express and reflect on their own opinions, presuppositions, and prejudices. Third, I emphasize the importance of sharp writing skills. Regardless of my students’ future career plans, I expect them to leave my course with significantly enhanced research, analytical, and communication skills.

Brief Description: This course surveys the history of American religions from pre-contact times to the present, focusing on the evolution of religious faiths as varying groups came into contact with one another. In particular, the course will analyze how steady immigration and limited governmental intrusion produced a diverse and pluralistic culture that places tremendous value on religious beliefs. In addition, the course will focus specifically on the ways in which Americans have used religion to shape their communities, their cultures, and their nation. Religion has never been simply about belief; it is always about actions as well. As a result, this course will place heavy emphasis on “lived” religion, or religion “on the ground.”

Justification/Rationale: There are a number of reasons why this course is essential for students in the liberal arts.

First, for students to be informed and enlightened citizens, it is essential that they understand the ways in which different people approach the major questions of life. It is critical that WSU students understand the pervasive role that religion plays in the nation.

Second, this course will give students a better understanding of and appreciation for the United States’ tremendous diversity. The emphasis on this course will be on the varieties of faiths practiced in the nation.

Third, the so-called culture wars have been underway since before today's college students were born. This course is intended to speak to the issues and the ideas that have defined public discussion of religion throughout their lives. Ultimately, I trust that this course will help students understand that struggles to define the relationship between religion and American culture have a deep and abiding history, one that has been with us since Europeans first encountered Native Americans and one that will be with us for generations to come.

Fourth, the course will draw on interdisciplinary methods. History, sociology, anthropology, religious studies and cultural studies all inform the way I am organizing this course. Such an interdisciplinary approach will help students think outside of narrow conceptual boxes.

Washington State University
College of Liberal Arts
Department of History
RELIGION AND AMERICAN CULTURE
Prof. Matthew A. Sutton

History 407 (3 credits)
Fall 2009
Day and Time
Classroom

Office: Wilson Hall 320
Hours: M/W, 9-9:50, 2-3
(509) 335-8374
e-mail: sutton@wsu.edu
Website: ANGEL

Course Description

The United States is one of the most religious nations in the world, a point that was famously articulated by Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835. “On my arrival in the United States,” he recalled, “the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention.” Yet the impact of the separation of church and state on the broader culture was even more significant to de Tocqueville than the preponderance of religion. “The longer I stayed there,” he continued, “the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things. In France I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country.”

But his analysis came with a warning. “But if [religion] be mixed up with the bitter passions of the world, it may be constrained to defend allies whom its interests, and not the principle of love, have given to it; or to repel as antagonists men who are still attached to it, however opposed they may be to the powers with which it is allied. The church,” he cautioned, “cannot share the temporal power of the state without being the object of a portion of that animosity which the latter excites.”

This was a warning that Americans have never heeded. In fact, de Tocqueville’s observation that religion and politics in the United States had separate spheres of influence was and is more myth than reality. Faith has always played a tremendous role in American culture, which is the focus of this course.

This course surveys the history of American religions from pre-contact times to the present, focusing on the evolution of religious faiths as varying groups came into contact with one another. In particular, the course will analyze how steady immigration and limited governmental intrusion produced a diverse and pluralistic culture that places tremendous value on religious beliefs. In addition, the course will focus specifically on the ways in which Americans have used religion to shape their communities, their cultures, and their nation. Religion has never been simply about belief; it is always about actions as well. As a result, this course will place heavy emphasis on “lived” religion, or religion “on the ground.”

Course Format

Lecture and discussions

Course Texts

- Butler, Jon, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer. *Religion in American Life: A Short History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Griffith, R. Marie. *American Religions: A Documentary History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Harding, Susan Friend. *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Holmes, David L. *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Johnson, Paul and Sean Wilentz. *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America*. New York: Oxford University press, 1994.
- Sutton, Matthew Avery. *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- X, Malcolm. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1964.

Course Requirements

Participation: Attendance is required, and everyone is expected to participate in class discussions. Discussions allow students to learn to express their thoughts in clear and consistent ways, and to work out their ideas among their peers. I expect everyone to be completely respectful of the opinions of others.

Exams: There will be a midterm and a final exam in this course. Exams will test students' knowledge of course material, ability to analyze primary source documents and to place them in a larger context, and ability to write sharp, coherent analytical essays. They will consist of short answer and essay questions. The final exam will have at least one cumulative essay question.

Documentary Analysis: Students are required to write a two-to-three page analysis of one of the following documentaries. The analysis should explain the context from which the documentary grew, discuss the major interpretive conclusion(s) or argument(s) that the documentary is making, and demonstrate how that argument is supported in the film (through images, music, talking-head commentary, etc.). The student should also offer his/her own critical analysis of the documentary based on course materials.

America's Godly Heritage
Burying the Past
Devil's Playground
Eyes of Tammy Faye
Frisbee

Hell House
Jesus Camp
Jonestown
Sister Aimee
This Far by Faith (any episode)

Paper Assignments:

The paper assignments in this course are designed to give students the opportunity to do history. Students get to detect the story, drive the analysis, and make the argument. Ultimately they will determine what is REALLY significant about the role of religion in American culture.

Both papers should be double-spaced with one-inch margins and 12-point font. The papers should be carefully documented with citations made in either endnotes or footnotes (not parenthetical notes in the body of the paper). For a guide to proper citation style, see *The Chicago Manual of Style* or Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers* (both from University of Chicago Press).

Rubric: Papers will be graded according to the following criteria:

- The paper has a clear thesis that establishes its argument (20 points possible).
- The paper is well organized, with each paragraph relating to the thesis and to each other in a logical, consistent manner (20 points possible).
- The paper makes good use of a wide variety of primary sources and quotations as evidence to back up its arguments (20 points possible).
- The paper is well written and free of grammatical errors (20 points possible).
- Additional comments (20 points possible).
- The paper has cited all of its sources (Yes/No)—failure to cite sources will result in a failing grade.

PAPER #1 (3-5 pages): The first paper will be a short (3-5 pages) analysis of one of the documents in Section I of *American Religions*. This paper should summarize the text, place it into its broader historical context, and explain its significance to the history of religion in the United States.

PAPER #2 (10-12 pages): The second paper will allow students to identify and research a topic of their choice. Papers will focus on a significant individual, a religious group, or a religious movement. Students will explain the history behind their individual/group/movement and then trace how their individual/group/movement evolves over time. The paper should explain the ways in which their topic influenced and/or was influenced by the broader American culture. The paper should represent original research and draw heavily from primary sources and can, as appropriate, synthesize secondary sources, lectures, and course readings.

In selecting a topic students should (1) choose a **specific topic** that interests them AND that they can sufficiently research in the time allotted. (2) Investigate and assemble both **primary and secondary sources**. Papers will need to utilize at least ten secondary sources (books, journal articles, etc.) and at least ten primary sources (sermons, tracts, memoirs, newspaper accounts, government documents, magazine articles, etc). If students cannot find sufficient sources for their topic, they will need to expand or change it. If they need to order materials through Interlibrary Loan, they should do this early in the semester. If they plan to use ANY internet collections or sources, they **MUST DISCUSS THEM WITH ME FIRST**.

As students begin their papers, they should keep the following questions in mind: How would they initially describe the individual/group/movement? What about the American cultural world in which the individual/group/movement grew and developed? What changed for the individual/group/movement during the time period under examination? What remained more or less the same? How did the broader American culture affect and influence the changes? How did the broader American culture affect and influence the continuities? How did the changes and continuities influence the broader American culture?

Papers must advance a clear thesis or argument. In other words, students will not simply be writing about what happened, but explaining why what happened was **significant** to our understanding of religion in United States history.

Writing Center (CUE 403): The Writing Center at WSU is an important resource that can help students with their papers. The Writing Center provides several no-cost, student-centered tutoring services designed to help students with the writing challenges they face at the university level. I encourage students to take advantage of this resource. More information can be found at: <http://www.writingprogram.wsu.edu/units/writingcenter/>

Academic Honesty

All members of the academic community at WSU are expected to practice and uphold standards of academic integrity and honesty. Academic integrity means representing oneself and one's work honestly. Misrepresentation is cheating since it means the student is claiming credit for ideas or work not actually his or her own and is thereby seeking a grade that is not actually earned.

Plagiarism is using someone else's work or ideas without giving that person credit. By doing this, a student is, in effect, claiming credit for someone else's thinking. Whether the student has read or heard the information used, the student must document the source of information. When dealing with written sources, a clear distinction should be made between quotations, which reproduce information from the source word-for-word within quotation marks, and paraphrases, which digest the source of information and produce it in the student's own words. Both direct quotations and paraphrases must be documented. Even if a student rephrases, condenses or selects from another person's work, the ideas are still the other person's and failure to give credit constitutes misrepresentation of the student's actual work and plagiarism of another's ideas. Buying a paper or using information from the Internet without attribution and handing it in as one's own work is plagiarism.

Any student who plagiarizes will receive a failing grade for this course and will face additional discipline from the Office of Student Conduct.

Learning Objectives:

The Department of History's undergraduate program is designed to produce several outcomes. We expect students who complete this course to: **identify** and state problems of historical

analysis; **communicate** the solutions to the above in words; **understand** the difference between fact and interpretation; **recognize** the contested nature of evidence and the value of historical scholarly debate; **show** awareness of change over time; be able to **place** the present in a historically based context; and **demonstrate** information retrieval skills required for historical research.

Students with Disabilities:

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please visit the Disability Resource Center (DRC). All accommodations **MUST** be approved through the DRC (Admin Annex Bldg, Room 205). Please stop by or call 509-335-3417 to make an appointment with a disability specialist. If you have questions, please contact Rosie Pavlov at pavlovr@wsu.edu or 335-3417. Additional information is available on the DRC website at www.drc.wsu.edu.

Grade Breakdown:

Attendance and Participation: 10%
Documentary Analysis: 10%
Exams: 35% (15%, 20%)
Papers: 45% (15%, 30%)

Grade Scale:

93-100%=A	90-92%=A-	87-89%=B+	83-86%=B
80-82%=B-	77-79%=C+	73-76%=C	70-72%=C-
67-69%=D+	63-66%=D	60-62%=D-	0-59%=F

Important Dates:

SEP 29: Paper #1 Due
OCT 17: Midterm Exam
OCT 27: Paper #2 Topic Due
NOV 10: Paper #2 Bibliography Due
NOV 17: Documentary Analysis Due
DEC 1: Paper #2 Due
TBA: Final Exam

Course Schedule:

WEEK 1 (AUG 25-29): When Worlds Collide
 READING: *Religion in American Life* (hereafter *RAL*) 1-50

WEEK 2 (SEP 1-5): The Puritan Experiment
 READING: *American Religions* (hereafter *AR*) 1-63; *RAL* 51-75

WEEK 3 (SEP 8-12): Colonial Diversity
READING: *AR* 63-90; *RAL* 76-117

WEEK 4 (SEP 15-19): Reviving Colonial America
READING: *AR* 91-138; *RAL* 118-164; begin *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*

WEEK 5 (SEP 22-16): Forming a New Nation
READING: *AR* 138-162; *RAL* 165-181; *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*

WEEK 6 (SEP 29-OCT 3): Democratizing American Christianity
SEP 29: PAPER #1 DUE
READING: *AR* 163-164, 183-197, 245-282; *RAL* 182-196; begin *Kingdom of Matthias*

WEEK 7 (OCT 6-10): Prophets and Visionaries
READING: *AR* 164-183; *RAL* 197-226; *Kingdom of Matthias*

WEEK 8 (OCT 13-17): Crisis and War
OCT 17: MIDTERM EXAM
READING: *AR* 197-245; *RAL* 227-262

WEEK 9 (OCT 20-24): Alternative Faiths
READING: 283-284, 328-365; *RAL* 279-291; begin *Aimee Semple McPherson*

WEEK 10 (OCT 27-31): Christianity Shaken
OCT 27: PAPER #2 TOPICS DUE
READING: *AR* 389-434; *RAL* 292-363; *Aimee Semple McPherson*

WEEK 11 (NOV 3-7): The Immigrant Experience
READING: *AR* 284-328, 365-389; *RAL* 263-278

WEEK 12 (NOV 10-14): American Religion at Mid-Century
NOV 10: PAPER #2 BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE
READING: *AR* 434-492, 517-534; *RAL* 364-384; begin *Malcolm X*

WEEK 13 (NOV 17-21): Civil Rights and Social Turmoil
NOV 17: DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS DUE
READING: *AR* 492-517; *RAL* 385-423; *Malcolm X*

THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK 14 (DEC 1-5): Focusing on the Family
DEC 1: PAPER #2 DUE
READING: *AR* 535-586; *RAL* 424-437; begin *The Book of Jerry Falwell*

WEEK 15 (DEC 8-12): Church, State, and Religion in Modern America

For the personal use of teachers. Not for sale or redistribution.
© Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, 2009

READING: *AR* 587-637; *RAL* 438-460; *The Book of Jerry Falwell*

FINAL EXAM: TBA