

Religion in American History
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Institutional Setting

The University of Northern Colorado (UNC) is a state-funded research university in Greeley, Colorado with 9,700 undergraduates and 2,400 graduate students. Founded in 1889 as the State Normal School of Colorado, the institution became a research university slowly over time. Its name changes, Colorado State Teachers College, 1911-1934, Colorado State College of Education, 1935-1956; Colorado State College, 1957-1969, University of Northern Colorado, 1970-present, reflect this process. Around the state, undergraduate and graduate-level teacher education remains UNC's claim to fame. UNC promises the benefits of a large research university (six colleges and more than 100 majors from which to choose) and a student-centered learning experience (small class sizes and a faculty dedicated to teaching). In terms of recruitment and identity, UNC faces the challenge of not being located in Denver, Boulder, or Fort Collins, three places with research universities closer to the mountains and widely perceived as more attractive and dynamic than Greeley. At the same time, Greeley's smaller size and more conservative political climate make it comfortable and appealing to many of our students. As a result, the institution draws together an interesting variety of students from around the state. 87% of our undergraduates come from Colorado. UNC's racial makeup largely mirrors that of the state: 75% of UNC students identify as white, 14% Hispanic, 3% African-American, 2% Asian, and less than 1% Native American. 36% of UNC undergraduates are first-generation college students.

Curricular Context

I am the early Americanist and one of eleven faculty members in the history department. Half of our roughly 200 history majors are in the secondary teacher education program (STEP); the others are pursuing B.A.s in history. A strength of our curriculum is that students in the STEP program must complete the same course requirements as those seeking a B.A. in history. Our upper-division classes are filled mostly with history majors and minors. UNC does not have a religious studies department. Of the five American historians, I am the only one who specializes in American religious history. I added this course to the curriculum in 2011 and have taught it three times. It is an elective upper-division class, usually capped at 25 students. The class design must align with the history department's student learning outcomes for 300-level courses—for example, students are required to use both primary and secondary sources to compose an original thesis-driven research paper.

Teaching Methodology

This is likely the only class history majors will take on American religion, so I designed it with broad coverage in mind. It aims to provide an overview of religion's role in shaping American history from 1492 to the present. No small task, I know. At the same time, I am committed to providing something more than a seed catalog of American religious groups. I want students to dig deeply into the complexities of studying religion and taking the claims of religious actors seriously. So I try to balance coverage and "un-coverage" by offering a general narrative and structure of American religious history (mostly via the Williams book and brief supplemental lectures) and more detailed, challenging primary and secondary sources. The course design reflects the trust I place in my students to do the reading and arrive prepared to discuss it. This is sometimes misplaced and painful. At its best, it is invigorating. Every class is guided by a handful of learning outcomes—that is, a set of ideas or developments I want to make sure students grasp. I then compose a list of three to five questions designed to lead students to and through the learning outcomes. When this fails—that is, when students either did not complete or understand the reading—I resort to content-driven questions that function as a proxy lecture from or summary of the reading's key themes. After these are clarified, I return to the day's open-ended questions and learning outcomes.

Religion in American History

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History 322
Class meets from
10:10-11:00 MWF
in Ross Hall 2260

Course Description and Goals:

“The religious atmosphere of the country was the first thing that struck me on arrival in the United States.”—Alexis de Tocqueville, (1835)

[America is] “a nation with the soul of a church.”—G.K. Chesterton, (1920)

America has long been recognized for its distinct religiosity. This semester, we will examine the complex role of religion in the American past and the process by which, often against its will, the United States became home to a baffling variety of religious groups who changed and were changed by America.

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. Use “religion” as a category of historical analysis.
2. Explain the core beliefs, practices, and (most importantly) experiences of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and other religious groups over time.
3. Analyze how religion and American culture shaped each other.
4. Create and complete an original, thesis-driven research project in American religious history supported by primary and secondary sources.

Format

History 322 is an upper-division history course that combines lectures, reading, writing and discussion.

Reading

In addition to a variety of articles and primary sources, you will be reading five carefully selected books this semester. Learning to love reading is perhaps the most important outcome of a solid university education. I hope the reading in this course contributes to that end.

The books:

- Peter Williams, *America’s Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-first Century*, 3rd ed.
- Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits*
- Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*
- Jeffrey Moran, ed. *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents*
- David Howard-Pitney, *Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and the Civil Rights Struggle of the 1950s and 1960s: A Brief History with Documents*
- I also recommend buying a copy of William Storey, *Writing History: A Guide for Students*. Older editions are available for a cent (plus shipping) on Amazon.

Assignments

Discussion and Participation

Discussion is the bread and water of this class. It will die, or at least be malnourished, if you do not arrive prepared to raise questions about, discuss, and debate the assigned reading and other materials. Your participation grade will be based on your attentiveness, your (informed) contributions to the course and your performance on in-class writing exercises.

Exams

There will be two in-class exams. You will need to bring a bluebook (available at the university bookstore) and a pen to each of them. The exams will be a combination of short answer and essay questions. The midterm exam will cover material through the first part of the course. The final exam will focus on the topics we cover after the midterm, but will also involve a comprehensive component.

Writing

You will be completing three writing assignments, all of which should be typed (double-spaced) using 12-point Times New Roman and 1-inch margins. Everything you write in this class must adhere to the **course writing guide**, which I have posted under “Course Materials” on blackboard. Please download, print, and become one with this document. Your grade will suffer should you make grammatical or other writing errors warned against in the writing guide.

Your citations should follow Kate Turabian’s, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, also known (affectionately) as the Chicago Style. If you are a history major, you should probably buy this book. Alternatively, you can purchase the history department’s “manual of style” for \$3.00 in Ross 3270.

All papers must be turned in via blackboard by the beginning of class on the due date. For details on the unpleasant consequences of tardiness, see the portion of this syllabus devoted to late exams and papers. A serious word of warning: do not use online sources without formally citing them in your writing. It is your responsibility to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarized papers will receive no points.

Book Reviews. For these assignments, due Mon., February 2 and Fri., Feb. 27, you will summarize and evaluate the historical significance of two books (Greer and Hatch). Each review should be 3 pages (no longer!). After summarizing the book’s central argument(s), you should explain how it contributes to an understanding of religion’s role in the time period about which it is written. This is sometimes referred to as the “So what?” question. For example, what does Nathan Hatch’s argument about religious life after the American Revolution suggest about the Revolution’s legacy? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Your book reviews will be graded on:

- The quality of your summary. (Did you grasp and articulate the book’s claims?)
- The sophistication of your analysis, particularly regarding the book’s historical significance. (Did you answer the “So what” question? Why should anyone care about or read this book?)
- The elegance and mechanics of your writing.

Research Paper. The second writing assignment, due on Friday, April 10 is an 8-10 page research paper in which you make a clear argument about how a religious tradition of your choosing shaped and was shaped by American culture during a ten to fifteen year period.

Take Note! Your paper must cite *and rely on* a minimum of four primary sources, two academic journal articles, and two books. Failure to meet this requirement will lower your final score by a full letter grade.

Your research paper will be graded on:

- The effectiveness and sophistication of your argument. (Do you have a clear and thoughtful thesis?)
- The extent to which you support your claims with evidence and place them in a clear historical context. (Do you use both primary and secondary sources to develop arguments?)
- The elegance and mechanics of your writing.
- The clarity of your organization.

Encyclopedia Entry. The third writing assignment, due on Fri., April 24, is your 3-5 page contribution to the class's Encyclopedia of American Religion. I will distribute a sign up sheet during the second week of class with a list of topics. Your final entry must rely on and reference at least two books, one scholarly journal article, and two primary sources. It should address the origins, core beliefs, key leaders (if relevant), statistical and demographic information, and the group's general reception in America or the United States. Finally, your entry must "locate" the group historically; that is, explain how the group or movement influenced and/or was influenced by ideas, events, and other contexts in American history. I will compile each entry into one larger volume toward the end of the semester, leaving you with a brief description and assessment of 20 religious groups written by your peers. During the last week of the semester, we will host a two-day exposition at which you will present your findings to the class.

Your encyclopedia entry will be graded on:

- Its coverage and description of the topic (Does it convey the group's the core beliefs, composition, and general reception?)
- Its use of primary and secondary sources (Does it incorporate scholarly interpretation and not just "information"?)
- Its effectiveness in locating the topic historically (Does it explain how the group influenced and was influenced by historical factors?)
- The elegance and mechanics of its prose.

Grading

Your grade for History 322 will be calculated out of 390 points:

- Discussion and participation are worth 15 points
- Two book reviews are worth 50 points (25 points each)
- The encyclopedia entry is worth 50 points
- The research paper is worth 100 points
- The midterm exam is worth 75 points
- The final exam is worth 100 points

All questions regarding the accuracy of exam and paper grades must be addressed no later than two weeks from the day I return the assignment. Any student who does not complete every assignment in the bulleted list above within a week of its due date will automatically fail the course.

Course Grading Scheme

Your grade will be calculated using the plus/minus system. Specifically, pluses will be given to every grade ending in 7 or above within its percentile; minuses will be given to all grades ending in 3 or below within a percentile. The percentiles are as follows: 90th=A, 80th=B, 70th=C, 60th=D, 50th and below=F. For example, within the B range, an 80 to an 82 percent overall grade will earn a B-, an 83 to 86 will earn a B, and an 87 to an 89 will earn a B+. There will be no A+ or F-.

Contacting Me:

I look forward to meeting with and getting to know you. My office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays from 1:15-2:30 in Ross 3285A. Feel free to stop by during that time without an appointment. If you would like to arrange to meet at a specific time during my office hours, you can do so either in person before or after class or by email. If you have a scheduling conflict during my office hours, I will be happy to arrange another time.

I will always attempt to respond promptly to your email or phone call. Still, you should plan to wait 12-24 hours to hear back from me.

Course Policies

Attendance

I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. Please be on time. Arriving more than ten minutes late will count as an absence. Because participation and discussion are critical to this course, any student with more than six unexcused absences will automatically fail the class.

Missed Exams and Late Papers

Exams and assignments must be completed on the days indicated on the syllabus. If an emergency occurs preventing you from doing so, it is your responsibility to make a reasonable effort to contact me by phone or email within two days. Assignments may only be made up with a valid note from a relevant source (doctor, psychiatrist, funeral director, etc.). Unless you have a legitimate, university-recognized, reason for doing so, any paper turned in after the *beginning* of class will receive no points. Even in this case, you must complete the paper in order to pass the course—see “grading” for further details.

Classroom Civility

Do not use your phone (unless it is truly an emergency) between 10:10 and 11:00. My strong preference is that you turn it off (gasp!). Really, have you tried it? Devices are making it harder to stay attentive for a relatively long period of time. Instead, many of us push a button of some sort at the first hint of boredom. I would like us to cultivate focused attentiveness during our time together.

If you possess the superhuman ability to “read” assigned books on your tiny phone screen, please let me know. In general, I think this is a bad idea; however, if it is your best option, we can discuss how to proceed.

If you play a game, send a tweet, shoot a text, snap a chat, or do anything other than read or take notes on your device, I will count you absent that day.

Academic Honesty

Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. The academic community regards breaches of the academic integrity rules as extremely serious matters. Sanctions for such a breach may include failing the assignment or failing the course. It is your responsibility to become familiar with UNC's Honor Code and student handbook; the policies and standards listed therein govern this course.

Students with Disabilities

If you need accommodations because of a disability, please inform me as soon as possible. To request academic accommodations (for instance, a note-taker), students must first register with Disability Support Services (DSS). The DSS office is located in Harrison Hall 159A and can be reached by phone at 351-2289 or by emailing Annie Murphy: annie.murphy@unco.edu

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

Week One

- Jan. 12 Introduction
- Jan. 14 Studying Religion
Discuss Williams, "Introduction: Telling Stories," 1-11 and Brad Gregory, "The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion," [posted on blackboard under course materials].
- Jan 16 Native, African, and European Worlds
Discuss Williams, 13-78 and "Comparative Creation Stories" [posted on blackboard].

Week Two

- Jan. 19 **Martin Luther King Holiday**. No class.
- Jan. 21 The Reformation(s)
Discuss Williams, 78-104.
- Jan. 23 Spanish and French Missions
Discuss Greer, Chs. 1-4.

Week Three

- Jan. 26 Jesuits and Indians
Discuss Greer, Chs. 5-9.
- Jan. 28 Anglicans and Puritans
Discuss Williams, Chs. 12-13 and David D. Hall, "A World of Wonders: The Mentality of the Supernatural in Seventeenth-Century New England," [posted on blackboard].
- Jan. 30 Captivity and Witchcraft in New England
Discuss Rowlandson, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God" (1682) and "The Examination of Tituba" and "Neighbors' Testimony" (1692) [posted on blackboard].

Week Four

- Feb. 2 The Pluralistic Middle Colonies
Discuss Williams, Ch. 15 and Ch. 19 and "John Woolman, "On Silent Worship" (1775) [posted on blackboard].
Greer Book Review Due
- Feb. 4 Catholics and Jews in Early America
Discuss Williams, Ch. 20.
- Feb. 6 Old Lights, New Lights, and Awakenings
Discuss Williams, Chs. 16-17.

Week Five

- Feb. 9 Debating Revivalism
Discuss Nathan Cole, “Spiritual Travels of Nathan Cole” (c. 1771); Jonathan Edwards, “Some Thoughts on the Present Revival of Religion” (1743); Charles Chauncy, “Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England” (1743) [posted on blackboard]
- Feb. 11 Rational Religion and Deism
Discuss Williams, Ch. 18.
- Feb. 13 The American Revolution, the Founders, and the Question of “Christian America”
Discuss Williams, Ch. 22 and Russell Shorto, “How Christian Were the Founders?” *New York Times*, Feb. 11, 2010 [posted on blackboard].

Week Six

- Feb. 16 The Audience, the Market, and Religion in the Early Republic
Discuss Hatch, Chs. 1-3; 5-7.
- Feb. 18 Dissenters and Disestablishment
Discuss Hatch, pages 67-101.
- Feb. 20 African-American Religious Life
Discuss Hatch, 102-113; Williams, Ch.27; Albert Raboteau, “African-Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel,” [posted on blackboard].

Week Seven

- Feb. 23 Early Mormonism
Discuss Williams, Ch. 30; Hatch, pages 113-122; Joseph Smith, *The Articles of Faith* (1842) and *Revelation* (1835)
- Feb. 25 Experimental Religion in Antebellum America
Discuss Williams, Chs. 28-29; Ann Braude, “Trace Lectures in Antebellum America”; Michael McClymond, “John Humphrey Noyes, the Oneida Community, and Male Continence.” [posted on blackboard.]
- Feb. 27 Catholic Immigration and Anti-Catholic Sentiment
Discuss Williams, Ch. 36; Liz Szabo Hernadi, “Mary Anne Sadlier’s Advice for Irish Catholic Girls”; Peter Gardella, “American Anti-Catholic Pornography” [posted on blackboard].

Hatch Book Review Due

Week Eight

- Mar. 2 Assimilation, Tradition, and Reform in American Judaism
Discuss Williams, Ch. 38; Jonathan Sarna, “The Debate Over Mixed Seating in the American Synagogue” [posted on blackboard].
- Mar. 4 Glory, Glory Hallelujah! Religion and the Civil War
Discuss Williams, 24; Drew Gilpin Faust, “Believing and Doubting: What Means this Carnage?”; Charles Reagan Wilson, “The Religion of the Lost Cause.” [posted on blackboard].
- Mar. 6 **Midterm Exam**

Week Nine

- Mar. 9 Mormonism and the “Mainstream”
Discuss Williams, Ch. 45; in class viewing and discussion of *The Mormons* (PBS).
- Mar. 11 Health, Healing and Metaphysics in the Gilded Age
Discuss Williams, Ch. 41 and Heather Curtis, “‘Acting Faith’: Practices of Healing in Late-Nineteenth-Century Protestantism” [posted on blackboard]
- Mar. 13 Apostolic Rain: Jim Crow, the Great Migration, and the Pentecost
Discuss William Seymour and Jenny Moore, “Pentecost has Come” (1906); Gaston Espinosa, “Tongues and Healing at the Azusa Street Revival” [posted on blackboard].
In class viewing and discussion of *This Far by Faith: Guide My Feet* (PBS).
 - Sign up for either Part II or Part III of Moran, *The Scopes Trial* for Mar. 27

Week Ten

- Mar. 16-20 **Spring Break**

Week Eleven

- Mar. 23 The Pueblo Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom
Discuss Tisa Wenger, “‘We Are Guaranteed Freedom’: Pueblo Indians and the Category of Religion in the 1920s.” [posted on blackboard].
- Mar. 25 Fundamentalism and Modernism
Discuss Moran, *The Scopes Trial*, Part I.
- Mar. 27 Scopes, Science, and American Culture
Discuss Moran, *The Scopes Trial*, either Part II or Part III.

Week Twelve

- Mar. 30 God Bless America: Civil Religion as a Way of Life
- Apr. 1 Traditions and Structures in Twentieth Century American Judaism
Discuss Williams, Chs. 46-47 and Jenna Weismann Joselit, “What is Jewish Culture?” *Huffington Post*, Feb. 6, 2012 [posted on blackboard].
- Apr. 3 American Catholicism after Vatican II
Discuss Williams, Ch. 48 and Robert Orsi, “‘Mildred Is It Fun to Be a Cripple?’ The Culture of Suffering in Mid-Twentieth Century American Catholicism.” [posted on blackboard].

Week Thirteen

- Apr. 6 Religion and the Civil Rights Struggle
Discuss Howard-Pitney, Part I “Introduction” and Part II, Chs. 1-3.
- Apr. 8 American Dream or Nightmare?
Discuss Howard-Pitney, Part II, Chs. 4-6.
 - Suggested background reading: Williams, Ch. 51.
- Apr. 10 Evangelicalism and the Rise of the “Religious Right”
Discuss Williams, Ch. 44.
Research Paper Due

Week Fourteen

- Apr. 13 “Cults” and the Study of Religion
Discuss, Steven Weitzman, “Religious Studies and the FBI: Adventures in Academic Interventionism” [posted on blackboard].
- Apr. 15 Watch and discuss *Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple*.
- Apr. 17 Watch and discuss *Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple*.

Week Fifteen

- Apr. 20 Latino/a Religious Life
Discuss Williams, Ch. 50.
- Apr. 22 Asian American Religion and Asian Religions in America
Discuss Williams, Ch. 53 and Carole Tonkinson, “Buddhism and the Beat Generation.”
[posted on blackboard]
- Apr. 24 Islam in the United States
Discuss Williams, Ch. 52.
Encyclopedia Entry Due

Week Sixteen

- Apr. 27 Islam, 9/11, and “Islamism”
Discuss Franklin Graham, from *The Name* (2002); *Letter to Franklin Graham from the Council on American-Islamic Relations* (2002) and Richard Rodriguez, “Danger and Grace: Sept 11 and America’s Religious Moment” [posted on blackboard].
- Apr. 29 Encyclopedia Presentations
- May 1 Encyclopedia Presentations and Conclusion

****The final exam for this course is scheduled (not by me!) for Friday, May 8 from 8:00-10:30 am. Please be sure to bring a bluebook and a pen.****