

**Religious Studies 4200 (Phil 6200): Religion in America**  
**Georgia State University**  
**Spring 2006 — MWF 10:00–10:50am — GCB 325**

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### INTRODUCTION AND COURSE RATIONALE

I teach this course at Georgia State University, a diverse university of about 30,000 students in downtown Atlanta. GSU has a very urban, commuter-school feel to it, and there are a good number of non-traditional (older than 30) students. Like many religious studies departments, ours has done well in the post 9/11 era; we grew from 2 full-time faculty in 2000 to 7 by 2005. Our majors went from 20 to 70. Hiring me was a part of the department's expansion. I joined the faculty in 2004-5.

I've taught this course three times now, and each time I do so it gets more contemporary. In its current form it is mostly a course on religion in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America. I've changed the course in this way mostly because students are more interested in contemporary material. But I haven't entirely given up the past. Actually, I love to teach the earlier material, and I do my best to get students excited about historical issues. (By the end of the term some even claim to be interested in learning more about "the Puritans"). I spend time talking about key historical problems, change over time, the strangeness of the past and the problems involved in understanding and trying to explain it. I try to introduce these issues by putting three themes in motion from the colonial period to the present. The three themes are: 1) what it means to be American or a religious American; 2) inter-religious encounters and exchanges; 3) personal religious experiences. Each theme helps me talk about, and sometimes explain, change over time. And each theme helps me organize the syllabus and choose readings. I think these are important themes in American religious history and they seem to interest my students. I usually have about 20-40 students per class. (Our courses are capped at 40).

GSU is a large, public university, but in religious studies we think of ourselves as a small, liberal arts department. In all of my courses I stress critical reading and writing skills. I devote class time and take-home assignments to reading closely primary documents, asking questions, making arguments, drafting, revising and writing style. I know that most of my students will forget 80% of the course's content in a few months, so I focus my energies on skills they can acquire and use in other classes and (perhaps) in life—how to read carefully, make arguments, write concisely. Most of their reading, and a portion of our class time every day, is devoted to working through primary documents and making arguments about them.

Class time is participatory. Though I often lecture, I also incorporate student input in my lectures and in other ways use activities that help students learn actively. One way I do this is by assigning “focus questions.” Students answer their focus questions while reading and bring their answers to class. As I lecture in class, I build these questions (and student responses) into the lecture. These focus questions force students to do the reading and be ready for our discussions and lectures. Sometimes I also do (10 minute) “warm-up” small group work at the beginning of class. In these exercises I’ll pose a question to each group and have groups help fill in my lecture outline. Groups report back and get into conversations with other groups, and with me. Occasionally this gets chaotic. I sometimes have to throw my outlines and expectations out the window. But I do find that when students are engaged in learning they remember the material better. And it’s more fun for me as well. I get bored listening to myself: “Here are the 5 key points of Islam in America: 1).....” It’s much more effective to bring in photocopies of young Muslim on-line chat sessions and ask students to identify key issues these believers are struggling with. (I’ve done this and it works great!)

I also invite guest lecturers to come—ministers, Mormons, Baha’is, Muslims. I had a session with a fundamentalist minister and a liberal Protestant that was disappointingly congenial. I have invited several very charismatic rabbis and an incredible, fired-up Pentecostal minister. It’s interesting when students interact with real believers. Some of my guests try to convert and convince my students. Some are openly critical. I’ve had offensive and intolerant guests. These are the best ones to have. They get students thinking!

One final word on assignments. Participation and paper assignments make up the bulk of the grade. I emphasize the paper assignments in particular. In class we work through different aspects of research and writing; students bring final drafts and do peer review exercises on them. (They exchange papers in class and evaluate each other using peer review guides that I provide.) Peer reviews and revisions help them produce better papers. But this process is not always smooth, and some don’t like it. In any case, in my classes students know beforehand that they will have to participate, talk to their peers, raise questions in class and work on their writing. I try to create an atmosphere of community that will foster open exchange, conversation and collaborative learning.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

What are the major cultural and intellectual forces shaping religions in America?  
How have religious Americans encountered people of other faiths and nationalities?  
How have they seen America as a promised land or place of refuge—or as a place of bondage, conflict or secularity? What are the main ways that religious Americans think about faith, spirituality, religious diversity and church and state? How might we understand the complexity of these and other issues in a country of so many different religious groups—Protestant, Jewish, Catholic, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim?

In this course we will examine these questions by looking at key American religious movements and figures. The Christian tradition, in its many American forms, will be a major focus. That tradition has shaped decisively the course of American history and American religious traditions in particular and it continues to do so today. There

will be several other topics that we will examine: 1) What it means to be an *American* or a religious American; 2) how Americans of different faiths have interacted, argued and cooperated with each other; and 3) how Americans have thought about personal religious experiences.

## OBJECTIVES

- Understand better American religious history and how it continues to shape us.
- Think carefully about American culture and religious life.
- Learn to read primary texts closely.
- Develop critical thinking and writing skills.
- Learn to evaluate and use evidence in written arguments.

## REQUIREMENTS

### *Participation Requirements:*

- regular unannounced quizzes (10%)
- focus questions on course readings (10%)
- participation during in-class discussions (10%)

### *Other Requirements:*

- Two short (5 page) essays (each will be 20% of your total grade).
- A midterm and a final exam. Both exams will be open-notes, in-class. The midterm will be 10% of your total grade; the final will be 20%.

**\*\*NOTE:** There will be additional requirements (and meeting hours) for honors and graduate students

## ATTENDANCE/MAKE-UP EXAMS

You will need to attend regularly to do well in this class. Material covered in lectures will appear on quizzes, exams and writing assignments. I will regularly hand out “focus question” sheets to help you understand and read carefully the assigned readings. These focus question sheets also will help you prepare for in-class discussions. Your answers to the focus questions are due in class. *If you are not in class you can not turn in (and get credit for) your focus questions.*

You can make up assignments for this course (focus questions, quizzes, exams, papers) only if you have a death in the family or a documented medical excuse.

## REQUIRED TEXTS (Please purchase or borrow a copy of each)

Strunk and White, *Elements of Style*

Edwin S. Gaustad and Leigh E. Schmidt, *The Religious History of America*

Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*

Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

**\*\*NOTE:** All readings with a “\*\*” are in the coursepack, which is available at The Print Shop on Decatur Street.

SEMESTER SCHEDULE (changes may be necessary)

**Weeks 1-2. Understanding Religion in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century America**

**M. 1/9: Introduction and Main Themes of the Course**

No readings for today

**W. 1/11: The Early Context: Native Americans and Christians**

Gaustad, *Religious History*, pp. 3-23

\*\*“John Winthrop’s Conversion”

**F. 1/13: What did Puritans Think and Believe?**

Gaustad, *Religious History*, pp. 49-65

\*\*“John Winthrop’s Conversion”

**M. 1/16: HOLIDAY**

**W. 1/18: How Did Puritans “Manage” Religious Diversity?**

Gaustad, *Religious History*, pp. 65-73

\*\*John Eliot and Thomas Mayhew, “Tears of Repentance”

**F. 1/20: Actively Reading Primary Texts**

\*\*Active reading handout

**Week 3. Reason and Faith During the American Revolution**

**M. 1/23: Revivals of “Heart” Religion—The Great Awakening I**

\*\*Study these documents in the coursepack: 1) Sketch of a Revival Meeting, 2) Portrait of George Whitefield, 3) Satirical Cartoon of Whitefield, 4) Whitefield’s collapsible field pulpit, 5) A “Report on Whitefield in New York,” 6) Charles Chauncy’s letter, 7) Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God,” 8) Edwards’s account of the Kingsley case, 9) Edwards’s “Farewell Sermon.”

**W. 1/25: Revivals of “Heart” Religion—The Great Awakening II**

\*\*Study documents used for M. 1/23

**F. 1/27: Religion and Revolution**

Edwin Gaustad, *Religious History*, pp. 121-138

\*\*Patrick Henry, “Bill Establishing a Provision for Teachers of...”

\*\*James Madison, “Memorial and Remonstrance”

**Week 4. Did American Christians Aid or Prevent Slavery?**

**M. 1/30: Slavery, Division, Civil War**

Edwin Gaustad, *Religious History*, Chapter 9

\*\*Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (selections)

**W. 2/1: What Did Slaves Believe?**

\*\*Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

\*\*Henry Bibb and William Thomson on Slave Religion

\*\*Albert Raboteau, “African Americans, Exodus and the American Israel”

Optional: \*\*Frederick Douglass, “What to a Slave is the Fourth of July”

**F. 2/3: What did White Christians Think about Slavery?**

\*\*”Letters on Slavery”

\*\*Texts on the Methodist and Baptist Schisms

**Week 5. Varieties of Religious Experience in Nineteenth-Century America**

**M. 2/6: African American Religious Experiences**

\*\*Jarena Lee, “Life and Religious Experiences”

**Good Draft of Paper #1 is Due at the Beginning of Class Today.**

**W. 2/8: The “Second Great Awakening”**

Gaustad, *Religious History*, pp. 140-160

**F. 2/10: Other Types of Religious Visions**

\*\*Primary Documents on Joseph Smith and Mormonism

**Final Draft of Paper #1 Due at 5pm today.**

**Week 6. Religious Alternatives to Revival: New Religious Movements**

**M. 2/13: Apocalyptic Visions**

\*\*Stephen Stein, “Apocalyptic Traditions”

**W. 2/15: “Liberal” Alternatives, Liberal Spiritualities**

\*\*Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Divinity School Address” (1838)

Check out Emerson and other info at the electronic archive of liberal religion at <http://www.jjnet.com/archives/>

**F. 2/17: Discussion on Reading, Writing and Midterm Review**

\*\*Joseph Williams, *Style* (selections)

**Week 7. 20<sup>th</sup>-Century America: Still a Promised Land?**

**M. 2/20: MIDTERM**

**W. 2/22: Protestants and the Perils of New Immigrants!**

Gaustad, *Religious History*, pp. 209-17; 222-228

\*\*Strong, *Our Country* (TOC, 41-2, 52-58)

**F. 2/24: Jewish Immigrants and Judaism in America**

\*\*Michael Gold, *Jews Without Money* (excerpts)

**Week 8. Jews and Catholics in America**

**M. 2/27: Catholics in America I**

\*\*Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, Introduction and Chapter 1

**W. 3/1: Catholics in America II**

\*\*Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, pp. 163-188

\*\*Robert Orsi, “Have *You* Ever Prayed to St. Jude?”

**F. 3/3: Catholics in America III**

\*\*Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, pp. 188-218

\*\*Elizabeth McAlister, “The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> St. Revisited: Vodou and Haitian Catholicism in the Age of Transnationalism”

**SPRING BREAK. NO CLASS 3/6-3/10**

*Week 9. 20<sup>th</sup>-Century America*

**M. 3/13: Discussion on Writing**

Handouts on Reading and Writing

\*\*Leigh Schmidt, “Freedom and Self-Surrender” (begin)

**W. 3/15: Spiritual Seeking and American Religious Liberalism**

\*\*Leigh Schmidt, “Freedom and Self-Surrender” (finish)

\*\*Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom* (selections)

**F. 3/17: Spiritual Seeking and New Religious Movements**

\*\*Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven* (selections)

\*\*Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom* (selections)

*Week 10. African American Religious Experiences*

**M. 3/20: Religion in the South and Malcolm X’s Early Life**

Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*—Intro, Chaps 1 & 2

\*\*Edward Ayers, “Faith” (from *Promise of the New South*)

**W. 3/22: Malcolm X**

Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*—Chaps 9, 10

**F. 3/24: Malcolm X**

Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Chaps 11, 12

\*\*Promotional materials from the American Muslim community

*Week 11. Malcolm X*

**M. 3/27: “Malcolm X”**

Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Chaps 13, 14

Gaustad, *Religious History*, Chapter 17

**W. 3/29: America—Dream or Nightmare?**

Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Chaps 17-19

\*\*James Cone, “Malcolm and Martin”

**F. 3/31: African American Christianities—Faith and Doubt Today**

\*\*Marla Frederick, “Strange Meetings” and “Righteous Discontent” (from *Between Sundays*)

*Week 12. Culture Shock: Immigrants Encounter America I*

**M. 4/3: New Immigrants and Their Faiths**

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You and You Fall Down*, 1-4  
\*\*R. Stephen Warner, "Immigration and Religious Communities in the US" (selections)

**W. 4/5: Hmong Immigrants in California**

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 5 and 6

**F. 4/7: Discussion on Writing**

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 8, 9, 11  
Handouts on Writing

**Week 13. Culture Shock: Immigrants Encounter America II**

**M. 4/10: Discussion on Writing**

Strunk and White, *Elements of Style* (selections TBA)  
Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*

**Good Draft of Second Paper Due Today at Beginning of Class**

**W. 4/12: Culture Clash Among Immigrants and American Doctors**

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* 14, 17  
\*\*Justice Wm. Douglas, Asian Religions According to the Supreme Court  
\*\*Justice Wm. Rehnquist, The Krishna Religion  
\*\*A Vietnamese Home Temple Zoning Dispute

**F. 4/14: Culture Clash Among Immigrants and American Doctors**

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* 18 to end.

**Final Draft of Second Paper Due Today at 5pm**

**Week 14. Pentecostal and Fundamentalist Encounters**

**M. 4/17: Pentecostal and Fundamentalist Traditions**

Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (tba)

**W. 4/19: Outsiders and Insiders Describe Faith**

Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (tba)

**F. 4/21: Covington on Conversion and Faith**

Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (tba)  
\*\*Susan Harding, "Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion"

**Weeks 15-16. Summary Points**

**M. 4/24: Covington as a Pentecostal**

Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (tba)

**W. 4/26: Covington and Outsiders and Insiders**

Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (finish)

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**\*\*Robert Orsi, “Snakes Alive”**

**F. 4/28: Religion After 9/11**

Handouts on Religion after 9/11

**M. 5/1: Wrap Up Session**