

History 1801

Religion, Politics, and Culture in America, 1865 – Present

Department of History
Brown University

“With the historian it is an article of faith that knowledge of the past
is a key to understanding the present.”
—Kenneth Stampp

Spring 2014
M, W 11 - 11:50 AM (plus discussion section)
Location: TBD
Teaching Assistant: TBD

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Course Description

Religion has played an undeniable role in the contemporary American cultural landscape, including 9/11, the era of George W., predictions of the end times, and public and private discourse about moral and social issues like immigration, teaching evolution, healthcare, stem cell research, and abortion. What are the roots of this widespread concern over and discourse about religion? What is particularly new—if anything—about our present cultural milieu? This course lends some perspective on the present by investigating the various and, at times, surprising role religion has played in history in the shaping of American culture. Although we will span the mid-nineteenth century through the early twenty-first century, the topics are addressed with an eye toward the present. Along the way we will linger on important themes as they relate to religion and culture such as racial formation, gender, violence, immigration, the founding of the U.S., religious diversity and toleration, slavery, social reform, politics, and empire. This course is open to any interested students. Prior knowledge of American history is helpful but not required.



Course Format

We are here to engage the past and the present! To that end, we will meet for lectures on Monday and Wednesday of each week, with discussion section options on Friday as well as another day (either Wednesday or Thursday) to accommodate athletes and others who cannot meet on Fridays. Each lecture session will open with a short example of a current event item that relates to the theme for that day. Discussion sessions will be devoted to the readings for each week. The amount of reading due for each session is highly variable; some weeks we will read an entire book, but for other weeks we will read only a few primary sources (documents from the period or movement we are looking at).

One of our larger objectives in the class is to practice the discipline of careful, historically-grounded analysis and discussion. This will be particularly important to keep in mind since many of the topics we will discuss are ones that we all likely care a lot about. Passion, energy, and opinions are good things! But in the classroom we want to keep our conversation civil, balanced, and most of all, grounded in the broader historical context under consideration.

Learning Objectives

The readings, lectures, and content of this course are intended to encourage the following:

1. Understanding of the historical background to recurring and contemporary themes in the history of religion in America;
2. Sharpening of historical reading and interpreting skills through interaction with primary and secondary sources;
3. Identification of some of the most important movements, individuals, and turning points in American religious history;
4. Engagement with the discipline of history as an interpretive process;
5. Informed, historically-minded analysis of current and recent events in the contemporary U.S.



Course Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation (15%): Your cheerful and informed participation in each session is desired and expected! Attendance is required at all lectures and sections. Exceptional circumstances must be cleared with me beforehand.
2. Completion of three of the following four writing assignments (20% each; 60% total):
 - Reading response: For one of the class sessions of your choosing, you will write a five-page analytical response paper on the readings assigned for that day. **Due at the beginning of the classes for which the reading is due that you have selected (please do not wait until the last week of class!).**
 - Media response paper: Each student will select one substantial essay (in a newspaper, magazine, or *respectable* blog), podcast, internet site, TV show, news segment, or other media selection (if too bizarre/obscure, check with me first; try to stay away from late night comedy) relating to the themes of this course to analyze in light of the historical contexts we

are studying. No formal outside reading is required, but a strong paper will relate the media piece you select to course lectures, readings, or some other piece of outside analysis. Length: 4-5 pages. **Due: Feb. 19, by the beginning of class.**

- Historical newspapers investigation: using the variety of historical newspapers databases available at Brown, for this paper you will research one of the class topics to learn more about it through newspaper coverage in that period. Length: 5 pages. **Due: March 19, by the beginning of class.**
 - American history newspaper options:
http://library.brown.edu/gateway/lrg.php?id=30&task=topic&topic_id=3
 - Additional newspaper resources:
http://library.brown.edu/gateway/lrg.php?id=62&task=topic&topic_id=9
 - Site visit / event participation: For this assignment, each student will identify (and receive approval beforehand from me regarding) an event to attend and analyze, whether a historical site, a religious service (must be one other than your own tradition), or a lecture or a political event on a relevant religious topic. In a 5-7 page paper, describe in an ethnographically rich way your experience of the event and then analyze it through the historical lens, themes, and readings of this course. **Due: April 16, by the beginning of class.**
3. Final exam OR Final research paper (25%). The research paper option should be used sparingly; it is NOT less work! Research paper topics must be cleared with me prior to spring recess. Final papers should be 12-15pp in length. **Exam date TBD; Final research paper due Friday, May 16, by 11:59 PM.**

Required Materials:

All required books (listed below) are available for purchase at the bookstore and are also on reserve at the Rock (prices from Amazon). Used copies of these books are likely readily available for purchase online.

- Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (\$10.17; 978-0306818363)
- Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (\$9.34; 978-0374525644)
- Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (\$24.44; 978-0807855010)
- Marie Griffith, *American Religions: A Documentary History* (\$41.99; 978-0195170450)
- Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*
- Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (\$22.99; 978-0195340846)

Recommended:

- Gaustad and Schmidt, *The Religious History of America* (\$11.71; 978-0060630560)

All other readings are available online (with links below), on [OCRA](#) (password: politics), or will be made available in photocopy form ahead of time. For linked articles, it is best to use the syllabus on the course web site (Canvas) to use the hyperlinks. The online syllabus will always be the most up to date. Please print out these additional materials and bring them to class.

A note on papers and written work

1. For all written work, please make sure that papers are properly formatted as follows: double-spaced, Times 12 pt font, with 1" margins, page numbers on each page, and footnotes for citations. Footnotes and bibliographies should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* (a summary is available on the course web site under "course resources").
2. Please read the "Guide for Beginners Writing History Papers" (on the course web site under "course resources") before writing your papers to make sure that you have a firm sense of what I expect in

your written assignments.

3. Please make sure that your papers make an argument and are analytical (that is, discuss several important themes using specific examples from the readings); purely descriptive papers will receive lower grades.
4. All papers should be emailed to me by the beginning of class for which it is due, unless another due date and time has been given. No hard copies of any written work need to be turned in unless requested. Unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand, **late assignments will be penalized one letter grade per day they are late**, particularly when papers are related to the discussion that will take place in class that day.
5. **Please note:** *Plagiarism or cheating of any kind will not be tolerated. If you borrow ideas, writings, etc., from other people and do not give them credit, the assignment will be given an automatic zero, and you will most likely be given a NC in the class. A good guide to avoiding plagiarism can be found at: <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/libweb/plagiarism.php>*

Other misc. classroom guidelines:

1. Please turn off all cell phones and pagers. Absolutely no text-messaging, emailing, or internet usage is allowed in class.
2. Laptops are permitted on a probationary basis. If they become an obvious distraction, I reserve the right to prohibit their use entirely.
3. Coming late or leaving early without warning me in advance will negatively affect your grade.

Research assistance

The Brown libraries research staff is always available to help with research. In addition to coming to my office hours for help, please also try the following options:

1. Consult the Library Course Guide for this class: <http://library.brown.edu/gateway/lrg.php?id=688>.
2. Contact the American history research librarian: Holly Snyder: Holly_Snyder@brown.edu
3. Ask a librarian: <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/libweb/askalib.php> (note that you can make an appointment for an individual research consultation)

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Background and Overview

Week One: Religion in American History

Jan. 22: Introduction to course

Jan. 24: Religion and politics in Colonial America [FRIDAY LECTURE]

Week Two: Religion, politics, and public life

Jan. 27: Religion and the founding of the U.S.

Jan. 29: Separation of church and state (or not) in American history

Jan. 31: In-class discussion of readings [FRIDAY MEETING]

Reading:

- David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (2010) (Introduction, chs. 1-3; OCRA)
- Thomas Jefferson, "A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom" (1779) (Griffiths, *American Religions* [AR] 150-152)
- [Rick Warren's prayer](#) at Obama's Inauguration, January 2009 (text and video)
- Jeffrey Weiss, "[Religious Language in Barak Obama's Inauguration Address.](#)" January 20,

2009, DallasNews.com

Unit 2: Themes in American Religion since 1865

Week Three: After the Civil War

Feb. 3: Religion and society after the Civil War

Feb. 5: West meets East

Section Meeting #1

Reading:

- [Chinese Exclusion Act](#) (1882)
- Mabel Potter Daggett, "The Heathen Invasion of America" (AR 384-389)
- Swami Vivekananda, "Hinduism as a Religion" and "Farewell" (AR 402-411)

Week Four: Challenges to a "Christian America"

Feb. 10: Darwin, Higher Criticism, and the Rise of Fundamentalism

Feb. 12: Industrialization, Progressivism, and the Social Gospel

Section Meeting #2

Reading:

- William Jennings Bryan, "[The Inspiration of the Bible](#)" (1924)
- Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" (1922) (AR 418-423)
- Walter Rauschenbusch, excerpt from *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1917) (AR 310 – 321)
- SKIM: [Transcript of Day Seven](#) of the Scopes Trial (1925)

Week Five: Americanization

Feb 17: NO CLASS

Feb. 19: Judaism in transition

Section Meeting #3

Reading:

- Pittsburgh Platform (1885) (AR 321-323)
- Mary Antin, excerpt from *The Promised Land* (1912) (AR 352-365)
- Abraham Joshua Heschel, excerpt from *God in Search of Man* (1955) (AR 434-447)

****Feb. 19: Media response paper due**

Week Six: Winning the West

Feb. 24: Ghost dances and peyote: Native American religious practices

Feb. 26: A Mormon in Washington

Section Meeting #4

Reading:

- Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity* (Intro; Chs. 1, 2, 3, 6, Epilogue; SKIM: Chs. 4 & 5)
- Black Elk, excerpt from *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of Oglala Sioux* (1932) (AR 341-352)

Week Seven: Religious improvisation

March 3: New Thought / Christian Science

March 5: Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity

Section Meeting #5

Reading:

- Mary Baker Eddy, "[Science, Theology, Medicine.](#)" Ch. 6 in *Science and Health* (1886)

- [*The Apostolic Faith*](#), vol. 1, no. 1 (1906) (see the [original front page](#) [need to scroll down])
- Dennis Covington, *Salvation at Sand Mountain* (entire)

Week Eight: Religion in an age of turmoil

March 10: Religion and the World Wars

March 12: Protestant, Catholic, Jew . . . and Anticommunism

Section Meeting #6

Reading:

- Will Herberg, excerpt from *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (1955) (AR 517-533)

Week Nine: Religious Lives of Women

March 17: Reconfiguring women's role in religion and society

March 19: Discussion

NO Section Meeting

Reading:

- Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (selections)
- Mary Daly, excerpt from "Beyond God the Father," 1973 (AR 536-547)

****March 19: Historical newspaper investigation due**

MARCH 24 - 28: SPRING RECESS

Week Ten: New Visions for Society

March 31: Reimagining Catholicism

April 2: African American Christianity and the Civil Rights Movement

Section Meeting #7

Reading:

- W.E.B. DuBois, "Credo" (AR 337-338)
- Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" (AR 502-514)
- John Seitz, "Introduction," in *No Closure* (OCRA)

Week Eleven: Religion and Empire

April 7: Religion and US imperialism

April 9: The Christian Right and Conservative Politics

Section Meeting #8

Reading:

- Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Intro, Chs. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11; SKIM the rest if you have time and interest)
- Mel White, "Letter to Jerry Falwell" (AR 599-602)
- Stephen H. Webb, "Introduction," in *American Providence: A Nation With a Mission* (OCRA)

Unit 3: Religion in the Contemporary U.S.

Week Twelve: Immigration and Religious Intolerance

April 14: Immigration and religion

April 16: Islam and Post-9/11 America

Section Meeting #9

Reading:

- Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (Chs. 1 - 7, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19)
- Margalit Fox, “[Life Went on Around Her, Redefining Care by Bridging a Divide](#),” in the *New York Times*, September 14, 2012
- Franklin Graham, Excerpt from *The Name*; “Letter to Franklin Graham from the Council on American-Islamic Relations” (AR 602-606)

****April 16: Site visit report due**

Week Thirteen: Pluralism and Popular Icons

April 21: Contemporary religious landscape

April 23: Wrapping up

Section Meeting #10

Reading:

- Eck, “Preface” and “Introduction, in *A New Religious America* (OCRA)
- “[The Religious Composition of the United States](#),” ch. 1 in *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*
- Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield, excerpt from *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom* (AR 571-584)

Final Exam: TBD

Final Paper: May 16, by 11:59 PM