

Religion in American History

Professor W. Scott Poole
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 Office Hours: T/TH- 9:30-10:30
 Tuesday: 2:30-4:00
 Monday: 2:00-3:30
 Friday: 2:00-3:00

Religion has played a crucial role in the history of the United States. At the same time, the history of the nation has played a crucial role in shaping America's religious traditions. This course asks why this has been so by exploring several lines of inquiry. First, what role did religion play in the development of American national identity (s)? Second, how has religious belief supported or challenged important ideological positions in United States history, from slavery to the notion of civic duty? Third, how has religion helped to define the notions of "mainstream" and "marginal" within American culture? Finally, in what ways have religion and popular culture interacted and influenced one another, especially in the twentieth century.

By the end of the course, students will have a working knowledge of the religious movements and trends that have influenced major turning points in American history. Thematically, they will be encouraged to consider the importance of religious faith and practice as a variable that influences historical change and development. Students will be especially encouraged to see religion as a variable at least as significant as the influence of race, class and gender and one that interacts with each those important variables.

Reading List: All of the following are required for the course:

R. Marie Griffith, *American Religions: A Documentary History* (primary sources-listed a "Reader" in lecture schedule)

Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion: Religion and Magic in Early New England*

Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion*

Edward Blum and W. Scott Poole, *Vale of Tears: New Essays in Religion and Reconstruction*

Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: The Early Pentecostal Movement in American culture.*

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*

Course Requirements:

You will take a **midterm** and a **final exam** based on text book readings, lecture and analysis of primary sources. There will also be three types of writing assignments.

- 1.) Students must write a two page book review of **three** of the following monographs: Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion*, Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, Wacker, *Heaven Below* and Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*. Reviews should describe the book's central argument, summarize some of the questions asked and conclusions reached and critique the overall effectiveness of the book.
- 2.) You will turn in one page responses to each of the primary source readings (marked Reader in the lecture schedule). These will be due on Thursday. We will not have readings from *American Religions* every week. You may also skip one.
- 3.) At the end of the semester, a 10 page interpretative essay that deals with a significant historical question raised by the course, will be due. A separate sheet will be distributed on this project.

Finally, on those weeks we have readings from *American Religions*, I'd like at least two students per week to sign up to serve as discussion leaders. I'd like you to give a closer reading than normal, prepare questions, discuss the readings with me ahead of time and then lead the class in discussion.

Grades:

Book Reviews: 10% each
 Primary Source papers: 25% (total)
 Exams: 20% (all together)
 Final Paper: 20%
 Participation: 5%

Class Schedule: Reading from primary source reader (*American Religions*) will be discussed on Thursdays. Students need to sign up in the first week to serve as discussion leaders.

Week One: Colonial Settlements and the Religious Worlds of Europe

August 26: Introduction

August 28: The European Background and Colonial Religious worlds

Week Two: Religious Worlds in conflict

Reader: 37-63 and essay by Robert Orsi, “Snakes Alive: Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth”

September 2: Colonial Religious worlds (continued)

September 4: Antinomianism and Indians: Conflict in Puritan New England
Discussion of readings

Week Three: Religious Worlds in Conflict: Was there a Great Awakening?

Reader: pp. 80-90

Article: W. Scott Poole, “ ‘Your Liberty in that Province’: Quakers in Colonial South Carolina”

September 9: Quakers and Witches

September 11: Was there a “Great Awakening?”
Discussion of Readings

Week Four: Religion, Enlightenment, Revolution

Reader, 157-162 and 148-150

September 16-Responses to the Great Awakening/Religion and the Revolution
Paper Due on Godbeer, *The Devil’s Dominion*

September 18-The rise of Methodism/ Religion and Slavery/ Early American Judaism
Discussion of Readings

Week Five: “Frontier Revivals and a “Second” Great Awakening

Reader: 164-171

September 23- The new revivalism: “The Burned-Over District”
African American Religion in the South

September 25- New Religious Movements: Mormonism
Immigration and the birth of an American Catholicism
Discussion of Readings

Week Six: Reform and Revival

September 30: American Utopia: Experiments in New American Community

October 2: “The End of the World as We Know It”: Millerites
Paper due on *Slave Religion*

Week Seven: “A Pact with Hell”: Religion and the Sectional Crisis

October 7: African American Religion: The Invisible Institution
 Religion and Slavery

October 9: **Midterm Exam**

Week Eight: Civil War and Reconstruction

Readings: Blum and Poole, pp.

October 14: No class

October 16: The Civil War as a Theological Problem/ Religion in Reconstruction
 Discussion of Readings

Week Nine: The Aftermath: Reconstructing American Religion and the Encounter with Modernity

Reader: 321-323, 402-410

October 21: Dwight L. Moody and the renewal of American evangelicalism/The
 “Americanist” controversy in American Catholicism/

October 23: Victorian America and the first encounter with Asian religion/ Immigration
 and Nativism revived/Darwin, Freud and the new Protestantism
 Discussion of Readings (including Blum and Poole, *Vale of Tears*)

Week Ten: Early Twentieth Century Crisis: Sectarianism and the Culture of Irony

October 28: The State of Liberal Protestantism/ Birth of Pentecostalism

October 30: World War I: Fundamentalism and Neo-Orthodoxy
 “Scopes Monkey Trial”: Two Americas?
Paper due on *Heaven Below*

Week Eleven: Religion and the American Century: Consensus

November 4: Post-War Religious Revival/ Neo-Evangelicals

November 6: The Protestant Establishment and Catholicism in the 1950s.

Week Twelve: Religion and the American Century: Challenge

Reader: 447-486, 536-546

November 11: Religion and Dissent: Coffin, Merton, Niebuhr, Day

November 13: Dismantling the Feminine Mystique: Religious feminism
Discussion of Readings

Week Thirteen: Crisis and Change in American Religion: The 1960s and 1970s

November 18: The Civil Rights Movement as a Religious Revival

November 20: The death of the Protestant Establishment
American Catholicism at Vatican II/*Humane Vitae*
Paper Due on *The Madonna of 115th Street*

Week 14: The Rise of the Christian Right and Alternative Visions

Readings: 587-602 (we will discuss next week. Also, while not required, I highly recommend the Stanley Hauerwas Essay on 550-561)

November 25: Moral Majorities, Lapsed Catholics and Neo-Pagans: Responses to change in the 70s and 80s

Week 15: "New" American Religions and the end of the Christian Consensus?

Reader: 602-609

December 2: Islam in America since 9/11
Asian Religion in American since the 1960s

December 4: The Decline of the Christian Right?
Trends in 21st century Religion
Discussion of Readings (including from week 14)

Final Exam: December 11, 12:00-3:00