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REL. 356: Christianity in America

Aim of the Course

The goal of this course is to gain an understanding of, and appreciation for, several of the central figures and movements in the history of American Christianity. In our studies, which will span three centuries (from the 1700's to the 1900's), we will examine the ideas and experiences of a wide variety of Christians, including conservative and liberal Christians, black and white Christians, male and female Christians, and Protestant and Catholic Christians. Hopefully, by the end of the course, students will have an insight into why some scholars of religion prefer to speak of "christianities" (lower-case "c," plural) rather than "Christianity" (upper-case "C," singular).

Educational Priorities and Outcomes

1. Students will acquire, integrate, and apply knowledge relating to multiple expressions of the Christian religious tradition in America, from the 18th to the 20th centuries.
2. Students will read and analyze challenging texts, speak clearly and listen actively as we discuss those texts, and write essays explaining their understanding and interpretation of those texts.
3. Students will respect the ways spiritual well-being may contribute to a balanced life by learning about American Christian beliefs and practices.

This course supports the Educational Priorities and Outcomes of Cornell College with emphases on knowledge, communication, and well-being.

Prerequisite

Sophomore standing is prerequisite for this course.

Course Requirements

1. *Class Participation (20% of final grade)*. Regular attendance at class meetings and regular participation in class discussions are expected. Additionally, each student will take a turn at initiating class discussion by identifying, and a raising question about, a passage in the assigned reading that they find particularly interesting. *More than one absence from class will progressively lower this portion of your grade.*
2. *Midterm Exam (25%)*, which will take place on the second Tuesday of the term. The exam will contain both short answer and short essay questions.
3. *A 4-5 Page Essay (25%)*, due on the third Wednesday of the term. Late essays will not be accepted without prior consent of the professor.
4. *A Take-home Final Exam (30%)*, due by 1:00 p.m. on the fourth Wednesday of the term.

Required Texts

1. John Woolman, *The Journal of John Woolman and A Plea for the Poor*.
2. Harold Simonson, ed., *Selected Writings of Jonathan Edwards*.

3. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *In Our Own Voices*.
4. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love*.
5. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*.

Class Meeting Times

After the first day of class (on which the class meets at 12:00 noon), class meetings will be held on weekdays from 12:15 to 3:00 PM.

Students with Special Needs

Students who need accommodations for learning disabilities must provide documentation from a professional qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. For more information see cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml. Students requesting services may schedule a meeting with the [disabilities services coordinator](#) as early as possible to discuss their needs and develop an individualized accommodation plan. Ideally, this meeting would take place well before the start of classes. At the beginning of each course, the student must notify the instructor within the first three days of the term of any accommodations needed for the duration of the course.

Academic Honesty

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgment of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Catalogue, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

Course Calendar

Note: The reading assignments listed in this course calendar are to be completed PRIOR to that day's meeting of the class.

WEEK 1

Monday: Getting oriented.

I. 18th Century

Tuesday: Woolman, *The Journal of John Woolman*, Chapters I-IV.

Wednesday: Woolman, Chapters V-VIII.

Thursday: Woolman, Chapters IX-XII.

Friday: Simonson, *Selected Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 19-71.

WEEK 2

Monday: Simonson, pp. 77-104, 123-139, 145-151.

Tuesday: MIDTERM EXAM.

II. 19th Century

Wednesday: Keller and Ruether, eds., *In Our Own Voices*, pp. 19-27, 32-45; 64-71, 76-97.

Thursday: Keller and Ruether, pp. 155-63, 166-78, 361-2; 209-16, 218-20, 222-38.

Friday: Keller and Ruether, pp. 249-56, 260-81; 293-305, 311-16, 323-8, 333-6.

WEEK 3

III. 20th Century

Monday: King, *Strength to Love*, Chapters 1-8.

Tuesday: King, Chapters 9-15.

Wednesday: ESSAY DUE, AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS.
In-class viewing of the films *I Have a Dream* and *All God's Children*.

Thursday: Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, **Part Two**, Chap. One: I-II, IV-VI; Chap. Two: I, IV.

Friday: Merton, **Part Three**, Chap. One (all); Chap. Two: II-V.

WEEK 4

Monday: Merton, **Part Three**, Chap. Three: III-IV; Chap. Four (all); Epilogue.

Tuesday: No class--work on take-home final.

Wednesday: TAKE-HOME FINAL DUE BY 1:00 PM.

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