

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN RELIGION

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General Information

What is American Religion? Does it make any sense to talk about American religion? What is American about American religion and what is religious about American religion? Religion in the United States is vital and diverse. It has been throughout American history. It is also a very important part of contemporary American culture and politics.

It is impossible in one term to hope to canvass the depth and variety of five centuries of American religion in a complete way. This course will instead introduce the student to religion in America through the consideration of three thematic approaches to a description of American religion as a whole. These thematic approaches cut across religious traditions and attempt to characterize some of the ways in which the extraordinary variety in the American religious imagination shares characteristics by virtue of its common environment and its common history. The three thematic descriptions of American religion that we will examine are Natural Religion, Disestablished Religion, and Constitutional Religion. There are of course other themes that could be chosen and we will from time to time note those other themes as they touch on our work.

The object of the course is to develop in the student a beginning competence in thinking, talking and writing about American religion.

Course Requirements

Preparation for class and participation in class discussion, including unannounced quizzes on the assigned reading. (20% of grade).

Media reviews: Each student will be expected every week to write a two page review of an article or story in the news pertaining to religion, and to be prepared to discuss it orally. The review should give a short summary of the story and then a brief response by the student, analyzing the story and reflecting on the relevance of the story for the themes of the course.(see handout for details) (20% of grade)

There will be one 10-12 page paper due at midterm. This paper will be a family biography of another member of the class, based on interviews and some library research, recounting the religious history of that member's family. (30% of grade)

There will be a final exam. (30% of grade)

All assignments, including preparation for class, are expected to be timely, unless prior approval is given. Lateness will be penalized. I will be very unlikely to give such approval except in extreme cases.

Required texts

Catherine Albanese, Nature Religion in America

Sam Gill, Native American Religions

David Hall, Lived Religion in America

Tony Hillerman, The Blessing Way

Christian Smith, American Evangelicalism

Peter Williams, America's Religions: Traditions and Cultures

Packet of excerpts (purchase from Karen Lyle)

Resources (on reserve in library)

Sydney Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People

Edwin Scott Gaustad, A Documentary History of American Religion

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND ASSIGNMENTS

wk.1

1/5 Introductory lecture/discussion: What is religion? What is **American** religion?

1/7 Assignment: read The Blessing Way

In class: discuss Hillerman, The Blessing Way

assign family history partners

Natural Religion

wk.2

1/12 Assignment: read Albanese, Introduction and ch 1

media review #1 due

In class: lecture/discussion on Natural religion

1/14 Assignment: read Gill, Prologue and chs 1-3

In class: lecture/discussion on Native American religion

wk. 3

1/19 Assignment: read Gill, chs 4-7

media review #2 due

In class: discuss Gill

1/21 Assignment: read Albanese, chs. 2 and 3

In class: Lecture on Republican and antebellum religion

Preliminary report on family biography project due

wk. 4

1/26 Assignment: read Albanese, chs 4 and 5 and Epilogue

In class: discuss A Road to Wellville (evening viewing)

media review #3 due

1/28 Assignment: read Hall, ch 7 and 10

In-class: viewing of "Sweating Indian Style"

Disestablished Religion

wk. 5

2/2 Assignment: read P. Williams chs. 2-11

In class: lecture on slave religion

media review #4 due

2/3 required attendance at Taylor Branch lecture

2/4 Assignment: read P. Williams chs.12-21

Hall, ch 3

In class: lecture/discussion on colonial religion

wk. 6

2/9 Assignment: read P. Williams chs. 22-30

Hall, ch 4

In class: lecture/discussion on antebellum religion

media review #5 due

2/11 Assignment: read P. Williams chs. 31-41

Hall, ch 5

Family biographies due

In class: lecture/discussion on gilded age

Washington Holiday

wk. 7

2/23 Assignment: read P. Williams, chs. 42-53

Hall, ch 6

In class: lecture/discussion on early twentieth century

media review #6 due

2/25 Assignment: read Smith, chs 1-3

In class: lecture/discussion Evangelical Christianity

wk 8.

3/2 Assignment: read Smith, chs 4-7

In class: media review #7 due

3/4 Assignment: read Mead and Herberg essays in packet

wk. 9

3/9 Assignment: read Hall, ch 2, 8 and 9

media review #8 due

In class:

Constitutional Religion

3/11 Assignment: read Pocock and Curry excerpts

In class: Lecture on religious freedom

wk 10

3/16 Assignment: read Howe, chs 1 and 2

media review #9 due

In class:

3/18 Assignment: read Howe, chs 3 and 4, Reynolds v. U.S.

In class:

wk 11

3/23 Assignment: read Howe, chs 5 and 6, Everson v Bd of Education

media review #10 due

In class:

3/25 Assignment: read Employment Division v Smith

In class: Lecture/discussion of disestablishment

View Peyote Road

wk.12

3/30 Assignment: Waco readings

In class:

4/1 No assignment

In class: Final lecture and Review