



HIST 362: Introduction to U.S. Religious History

Spring Semester 2012
TR, 12:30-1:45 PM
Jackson Hall 102
3 Credit Hours
James Madison University

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Course Description

This course examines the fascinating, unpredictable, and multifaceted story of American religion from the colonial era to the present, moving from Native American faiths to the religious roots of Walmart. As we seek to better understand the religious beliefs and experiences of many different individuals, we will also explore the workings of religious systems and communities, the remarkable variety and vigor of religious life in this country, and the role of religion in the development of American society and culture. Students will gain valuable experience in the new field of digital history and actively advance the study of religion in Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley by organizing and staffing a History Harvest in which community members share historical materials for digitization by James Madison University Special Collections and study by our class as well as future scholars. Many participants in this class may possess strong religious convictions. Our goal in the course is neither to establish nor undermine those beliefs, but rather to study the religious history of the United States using the language and tools of the academic community.

Books

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (Vintage, 1992)
David G. Hackett, *Religion and American Culture: A Reader* (Routledge, Second Edition, 2003)
Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias* (Oxford University Press, 1995)
Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers: A Novel* (Persea, Third Edition, 2003)

All books are required and are available for purchase at the JMU Bookstore.

Grading and Requirements

Participation: 10%
Midterm exam: 15%
Final exam: 15%
Film Responses: 10%
History Harvest: 20%
Religious Community Visit: 15%
Biographical Interpretation: 15%

Assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due. You will be docked one letter grade for every day they are late. You must pass in a hard copy of all written assignments, so please plan ahead to ensure you have access to a printer. No assignments will be accepted as email attachments.

Your attendance is expected at every class meeting. After three absences, every additional absence will result in the loss of one point from your final grade for the course. You will not be allowed to make up additional absences of any kind, so please attend faithfully and do not use absences unnecessarily.

Grades are assigned on the following basis: (A) deep understanding of the subject, insightful and creative analysis, and excellent writing (B) solid understanding, analysis, and writing (C) comprehension of basic concepts, competent but limited analysis, and intelligible but rough writing (D) clear and serious failures in understanding and analysis, unintelligible and error-filled writing (F) unacceptably poor work.

Participation

Ten percent of your final grade is based on participation in our class discussions. It is essential that you do all the assigned reading and come to class ready to participate. Effective participation means not just answering questions asked by the professor, but being alert and engaged, coming to class with questions of your own, responding thoughtfully to comments by other students, and contributing meaningfully and consistently to our efforts to grapple with the material. If you find it difficult to speak in class, come see me early in the course so we can discuss ways for you to improve. Your attendance is expected at every one of our class meetings this semester. After three absences, every additional absence will result in the loss of one point from your final grade for the course. You will not be given an opportunity to make up additional absences of any kind, so attend all class meetings and do not use absences unnecessarily.

Exams

The midterm exam will test your knowledge of the lectures and readings with a battery of multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questions. The final will be a take-home exam with two essay questions that ask you to discuss material from lectures, readings, and discussions throughout the semester. You will receive the questions at the end of class on April 26 and will have until 12:30 PM on May 3 to submit hard copies of your essays to the professor in Jackson Hall 219. No final exams will be accepted as email attachments.

Film Responses

During two of our class meetings we will spend time discussing films that examine aspects of American religious history. To prepare for these meetings, please watch the entire film and prepare two full pages of notes (typed and double-spaced) exploring the film's treatment of religion and its connections to what you are learning in the lectures and course readings. Students who complete both responses will receive an A; one response earns a D. *The Apostle* is on reserve at the library from March 13 to April 5 and also streams online at Netflix and Amazon (rentals for \$3). *Trembling Before G-D* is free at www.hulu.com.

History Harvest

Within the new field of digital history, historians have pioneered an innovative approach to collecting and studying the past. This class will adapt a model recently developed at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and work with JMU Special Collections to organize and host our own History Harvest. This event invites community members to share their records related to the religious history of Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley for digital preservation and study by our class and future scholars. In regular consultation with the professor and Special Collections Librarian, students will use their skills and creativity to plan the History Harvest. Everyone will join one committee: Technology and Legal, Event Planning and Media Relations, Outreach Rockingham, Outreach Augusta, and Outreach Shenandoah/Page. Each committee must submit a detailed action plan by February 7 and give detailed progress reports to the class as a whole on February 28 and April 3. Please keep a journal recording your personal contributions. Your grade will be based on your effort and engagement. The Harvest will be held on Saturday, April 14, and everyone must attend.

Religious Community Visit

Every student must visit and observe a religious community to which they do not belong. Please be sure to obtain permission in advance where appropriate, and to honor the community's standards for attire and other matters. Do not take notes during your visit, but be sure to record your observations soon after you leave. Gather any literature that the group distributes about itself. Combine your own observations with printed or online sources produced by the community itself and write a 1500-word essay discussing your religious community in light of four traits that often characterize religions: creeds (beliefs), cultus (ritual activities), codes (standards of conduct), and communities (institutions and organization). Your finished essay will be graded for the quality of your writing and the skill with which you relate and interpret what you have observed. Your work must be stapled, double-spaced, and carefully proofread.

Biographical Interpretation

After selecting a figure in American history from the list that I will circulate early in the semester, use the assigned biography to craft a first-person account illuminating that person's life story and religious views. You will be graded on the accuracy and creativity with which you relate your figure's story, express their beliefs, and communicate their voice. Immerse yourself in this person's life. Figure out what made them tick. Identify crucial events and relationships. Try to see the world through their eyes, and seek to speak in their language and voice. Make your person and their religious world come alive. Your interpretation should not be a boring list of facts and dates that sounds like a Wikipedia entry. It should be imaginative, exciting, and solidly grounded in historical evidence from the biography you have been assigned.

Please note that you may use only the professor-approved scholarly biography to research and write your biographical interpretation. No other sources may be used. Our campus library holds some but not all of these approved biographies, and some may be checked out. Whatever the case, it is your responsibility to obtain a copy of the assigned book—through Interlibrary Loan if necessary. No exceptions will be made, so you should begin working to obtain a copy immediately after selecting the person you will study.

You will read a condensed version of your first-person biographical interpretation during a class meeting. Please time the presentation to last exactly seven minutes. On the day of your presentation you will pass in a complete written version that will be graded. This version must be 1500 words long, double-spaced, stapled, and proofread. Please use Turabian Humanities-style citations in your footnotes to indicate page numbers from your academic biography with evidence supporting all claims and interpretations.

Plagiarism and the Honor Code

All work on exams and essays must be your own. Any case of plagiarism will result in an automatic F for the assignment, and, depending on the seriousness of the offense, for the entire course as well. Plagiarism involves copying the information, ideas, or phrasing of another person without proper acknowledgment of the original source. It is not always deliberate, sometimes occurring through carelessness or ignorance, so please carefully review the James Madison University Honor Code at www.jmu.edu/honor.

Additional Course Policies

Information on registration dates and deadlines, the first-week attendance policy, disability and religious accommodations, and other policies may be found at http://web.jmu.edu/history/syllabus_policies.html.

CLASS SCHEDULE

NB: It is essential that you bring copies of all assigned readings with you to class so we can refer to them during discussions. You will not be able to participate effectively without the readings. All essays listed below can be found in David G. Hackett, *Religion and American Culture: A Reader* (2003).

Week One: Contexts

January 10: Introduction to the Course

January 12: Contemporary American Religion: Prepare for class by completing the worksheet on contemporary religious life using the websites of the Hartford Institute for Religious Research (www.hartfordinstitute.org) and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (www.pewforum.org)

Week Two: Contact

January 17: Native American Religions: Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "The Pueblo Indian World"

January 19: French Canada: Daniel K. Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience"

Week Three: Colonies

January 24: Puritan New England: David D. Hall, "A World of Wonders"

January 26: Lived Religion and Material Culture in Early Virginia

Week Four: Revolutions

January 31: Enlightenment and Awakening: Rachel Wheeler, "Women and Christian Practice in a Mahican Village" and Ann Braude, "Women's History *Is* American Religious History"

February 2: American Civil Religion

Week Five: The Early Republic

February 7: The Second Great Awakening: Committee Action Plans due in class

February 9: American Millennialism: Johnson and Wilentz, *Kingdom of Matthias* (3-47)

Week Six: Evangelicalism in Black and White

February 14: Class canceled for Student Assessment/Faculty Assistance

February 16: Race and Religion in America: Albert J. Raboteau, "African Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel," William B. Gravely, "The Dialectic of Double-Consciousness in Black American Freedom Celebrations, 1808-1863," and Charles Joyner, "Believer I Know"

Week Seven: Religious Outsiders

February 21: Mormonism: Johnson and Wilentz, *Kingdom of Matthias* (49-90)

February 23: The Kingdom of Matthias: Johnson and Wilentz, *Kingdom of Matthias* (91-179)

Week Eight: Exam Week

February 28: History Harvest Progress Reports and Planning Session

March 1: Midterm Exam

Week Nine: No Class (Spring Break)

Week Ten: The Civil War

March 13: Religion and Violence

March 15: Reforging the White Republic: Charles Reagan Wilson, "The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion, 1865-1920"

Week Eleven: The Modern World

March 20: Commerce and Material Culture: Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Easter Parade: Piety, Fashion, and Display" and Yeziarska, *Bread Givers* (1-151)

March 22: Gender: Robert A. Orsi, "Women's Devotion to Saint Jude," Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Debate Over Mixed Seating in the American Synagogue," Yeziarska, *Bread Givers* (155-201)

Week Twelve: The Old Faith in a New World

March 27: Immigrant Experiences: Yeziarska, *Bread Givers* (202-297)

March 29: Regulating Orthodoxy: Watch *Trembling Before G-D*—Film Response due in class

Week Thirteen: Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism

April 3: History Harvest Progress Reports and Planning Session: Grant Wacker, "Searching for Eden With a Satellite Dish: Primitivism, Pragmatism, and the Pentecostal Character"

April 5: The Fire Spreads: Watch *The Apostle*—Film Response due in class

Week Fourteen: Religion and Civil Rights

April 10: Prophetic Religion: Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (15-47) and James H. Cone, "Martin and Malcolm: Integration and Nationalism in African American Religious History"

April 12: The Freedom Struggle: Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (47-106)

April 14: History Harvest (attendance required for all students—please plan accordingly)

Week Fifteen: Contemporary America

April 17: Alternative Voices: Thomas Tweed, "Diasporic Nationalism and Urban Landscape" and Joanne Punzo Waghorne "The Hindu Gods in a Split-Level World"

April 19: God and Walmart: Christopher Jocks, "Spirituality for Sale"

Week Sixteen: Conclusions

April 24: Religious Communities: Religious Community Visit essay due in class

April 26: American Religion Past and Present

Final Exam: You will receive your exam questions on April 26 and will have until 12:30 PM on May 3 to submit hard copies of your essays to the professor in Jackson Hall 219.

Please note that this syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the professor.