

## **Religion and Culture in Early New England**

Adrian Chastain Weimer

### **Institutional Setting**

Providence College is a small liberal arts institution in Rhode Island, established in 1917. There are 3800 undergraduates, most of whom live on or near campus in a close-knit community. The college is Dominican and Catholic in its mission, affirming both academic freedom and the belief that ultimately “faith and reason are compatible.” The majority of the student body is Roman Catholic, with sizeable minorities of Protestant, Jewish, and unaffiliated students, as well as a growing Muslim population. Most come from the northeast, though a Division I athletics program draws students nationally as well. Approximately twelve percent of the student body are from African-American, Hispanics, Asian, or Native American backgrounds, a number that the administration is working hard to increase through the Office of Institutional Diversity and a strong emphasis on diversity in the Core Curriculum. Students are motivated and tend to be willing to put in a remarkable number of hours outside of class. Many grew up in New England and are puzzled by and interested in their own regional history.

### **Curricular Context**

This course meets a need for electives in the history department, a popular major at the college. Most students would have already taken at least one of a three-course sequence in United States history, as well as a four-course sequence in the Development of Western Civilization. A junior or senior enrolled in this course, therefore, would have already read classic texts in the debates of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations and the western European Enlightenment. The course is also designed to satisfy an Intensive Writing II requirement in the Core Curriculum, which necessitates a substantial writing component and multiple stages of revision, and which limits the class size to twelve. The history department also has a small M.A. program focusing primarily on European and American history. Some of these graduate students could choose to take the course with additional writing and research requirements. Providence College is moving away from quantitative course evaluation of faculty in tenure and promotion review. The administration is encouraging the faculty to develop more rigorous courses and to resist grade inflation.

### **Teaching Methodology**

The course meets twice weekly in a small seminar-style classroom. Classes consist of a balance of discussion and mini-lectures, supplemented by occasional video clips, maps, images, and electronic resources such as America’s Historical Newspapers. To offset the passivity electronic media can induce, when using multimedia students are often asked to reflect (either in writing or in small discussion groups) on what they are hearing or seeing in light of its historical context. Most weeks we engage with at least one primary source, with the goal of teaching skills in reading accurately and critically. At least a few times over the course of the semester, students read these sources directly from the original (scanned in to America’s Historical Imprints, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, etc.) rather than modern editions in order to increase their sense of print culture, as well as their comfort-level in using electronic resources. Students at Providence College are bright but often timid in taking intellectual risks, and so part of the challenge is to build their confidence in tackling difficult material. Papers are submitted in multiple stages, with substantial opportunity for revision, and exams are designed to encourage integrative and creative thinking.

## **Religion and Culture in Early New England**

Dr. Adrian Weimer, Department of History  
Phillips Memorial Library LL05A

### **Course Description**

From William Bradford and Eunice Williams to Samson Occom and Jean Cheverus, in this course we will

meet fascinating people who thought deeply about faith and cultural encounters. The stories of the native Northeast, Protestant New England, and Catholic immigration are often told as separate or competing narratives. What are the webs of relationships, both real and imagined, that help us to understand the rich history of religion in early New England as an interconnected story? Contesting narratives of decline or unmitigated antagonism, we ask instead how both native and European groups continued to remake and reimagine themselves and each other amidst the challenges of American life. How is “New England” itself an unstable category, and how does the self-understanding of various groups change over time? Examining local developments alongside Atlantic world and imperial contexts, we inquire how everyday life in New England was interconnected with broader cultural, social, intellectual, and religious movements. In addition to native Americans, puritans, Baptists, Quakers, Huguenots, and French and Irish Catholics, we will also look at the significance of New England for early Mormonism, as well as the long history of Jews and Africans in the region. Special attention will be given to issues of migration, varieties of cultural prejudice and tolerance, supernaturalism, Protestant-Catholic relations, social reform, and the political and devotional decisions various groups faced as they negotiated a place on the religious landscape.

### **Course Objectives**

- To think critically and creatively about the assumptions and practices of religious groups early New England
- To understand local religious and cultural history within broader colonial and transatlantic contexts
- To explore the nature of encounters among religious traditions and the cultural and legal challenges of a diverse population
- To develop confidence, skill, and enjoyment in interpreting historical sources and writing in an academic style

### **Course Books**

John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* (Vintage Press, 1995)  
David D. Hall, *Puritans in the New World: A Critical Anthology* (Princeton University Press, 2004) [PNW]  
Rebecca Warren Brown, *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear, a Native of Africa, Who was Enslaved in Childhood, and Died in Boston, January 3, 1815...Aged 65 Years* (Boston, 1832) [available online]  
William Ellery Channing, *Remarks on the Character and Writings of Fenelon* (London, 1830) [available online]

\*\*Additional articles and book chapters are on Reserve as indicated in syllabus

### **Assignments**

- 15%. Active participation and weekly reading notebook entries. Each week, please come to class with an informed comment or reflection drawn from your reading notebook entry: be prepared to share these with the class. Your reading notebook should indicate not only that you have done the reading, but that you are thinking alongside the texts, making connections that relate the readings to each other, and generally becoming a conversation partner in the task of understanding American history. The notebook will be collected periodically. We will occasionally do in-class writing assignments and activities which will also contribute to your participation grade.
- 15%. A 3-4 page essay interpreting a primary source in light of its historical context.
- 25%. Take-home mid-term examination exploring a theme drawn from lectures, discussion and readings.
- 25% A 10-12 page paper incorporating your first essay and interpreting a theme in the history of early New England, to be selected in consultation with the professor.
- 20%. A final take-home examination.
- Extra credit (up to 4 points on final examination): A 1-2 page essay relating an article on religion or politics in a contemporary major newspaper or newsweekly to the readings and themes of the course.
- Optional:
  - Field trip to the Mashantucket Pequot Museum

- Field trip to First Baptist Church, Providence
- Field trip to St. Mary's Church, Touro Synagogue, and "God's Little Acre," Newport

### Important Information

- **Please bring to class:**
  - The week's readings and your reading notebook, so we can refer to them together
  - Blank paper for in-class writing assignments
  - (OPTIONAL) Newspaper or magazine clippings about current issues in politics or religion that have captured your attention or relate to the week's discussion.
- **Attendance** is crucial for success in this course. You are allowed two absences - further absences will affect your final grade.
- **Academic honesty:** There will be no tolerance for plagiarism or cheating in this course. Please do not hesitate to ask if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism.
- **Disabilities:** If you have an authenticated disability please notify the instructor the first week of class, and we will work together to provide reasonable accommodations.
- **Academic support:** I am available for individual meetings to discuss any questions or academic difficulties. I also encourage you to take advantage of the academic support services available to students at Providence College, especially the Writing Center, on the second floor of the Phillips Memorial Library.

### Syllabus and Class Schedule

#### Week 1

##### Tuesday **Cosmologies and Geographies**

Kathleen Bradgon, "Cosmology," in *Native People of Southern New England, 1500-1650* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 184-199.

Perry Miller, *The New England Mind*, Vol. 1 (Harvard University Press, 1939; reprinted 1982), Book II: Cosmology, Chapter VIII: Nature, 207-238.

##### Thursday **Plymouth Encounters**

Martha Finch, "Massasoit's Stool and Wituwamat's Head," in *Dissenting Bodies: Corporealities in Early New England* (Columbia University Press, 2010), 29-61. [on Reserve]

William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* [PNW]

#### Week 2

##### Tuesday **Life in Early Cambridge**

David D. Hall, "'Already in Heaven?': Church and Community in Cambridge, Massachusetts" in *A Reforming People* (Knopf, 2011), 159-190.

Thomas Shepard, "To My Dear Son," and *Confessions from the Churches of Cambridge* and John Winthrop, *Christian Charity, a Model Hereof* [PNW]

##### Thursday **New England's Radicals**

John Winthrop, *A History of New England* (and preceding introduction to "Dissenters") [PNW]

Roger Williams, *To the Governor of Massachusetts* [PNW]

John Clarke, *Ill Newes from New England* (1652) [PNW]

#### Week 3

##### Tuesday **The Quaker "Threat"**

Carla Gardina Pestana, "The City On a Hill Under Siege: The Puritan Perception of the Quaker Threat to Massachusetts Bay 1656-1661," *New England Quarterly*, LVI (1983): 323-353. [JSTOR]

Papers and Letters by William Robinson, Marmaduke Stephenson, and Mary Dyer, in Joseph Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers, for the Testimony of a Good Conscience* (London, 1753), II:198-205 [available through the Library Databases on Eighteenth Century Collections Online]

Thursday **Preachers and Healers**

John Eliot and Thomas Mayhew, *Tears of Repentance* and Experience Mayhew, *Indian Converts* [PNW]  
Douglas L. Winiarski, "Native American Popular Religion in New England's Old Colony, 1670-1770" *Religion and American Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Summer, 2005), pp. 147-186. [JSTOR]

Week 4

Tuesday **Examining the Covenants**

Increase Mather, *Pray for the Rising Generation* (and preceding introduction) [PNW]  
Samuel Danforth, *A Brief Recognition of New-England's Errand into the Wilderness* (and preceding introduction) [PNW]

Thursday **"Tyranny" and the Huguenot Refugee Crisis**

Ezekiel Carré, *The Charitable Samaritan. By Ezechiel Carré formerly Minister of Rochechalais in France, now Minister of the French colony in Narrhaganset* (Boston, 1689) Preface (by Cotton Mather) and pp. 1-6 [Available through the Library Databases on Early American Imprints]  
Brendan McConville, "Tyranny's Kiss" in *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 16-48. [on Reserve]

Week 5

Tuesday **Possession and Magic**

Samuel Willard, *A Brief Account of a Strange and Unusual Providence of God Befallen in Elizabeth Knapp of Groton* (and preceding introduction) [PNW]  
Examinations, Testimonies against, and Indictment of Tituba, in Richard Godbeer, ed., *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents* (NY: Bedford/St. Martins, 2011), 81-91. [on Reserve]

Thursday **War, Captivity, and the Conversion of Eunice Williams**

John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* (Vintage, 1995), 3-139.

Week 6

Tuesday **Antippery and the Frontier**

"The Devil and Father Rallee": Narrating Father Rale's War" in Thomas Kidd, *The Protestant Interest: New England after Puritanism* (Yale University Press, 2004): 91-114. [on Reserve]  
Father Sebastien Rale, S.J. "A Letter to His Brother," William Goodreau, *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Winter, 1957), pp. 534-540. [on Reserve]  
Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive*, 140-198.

Thursday **Research Workshop and Review**

Week 7

Tuesday **The New Birth**

*The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, ed. Carol F. Karlson and Laurie Crumpacker (Yale University Press, 1984), 293-296 [on Reserve]  
George Whitefield, *The Almost Christian* (Boston, 1739) [available on America's Historical Imprints]  
Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive*, 199-246.

Thursday **Native Awakenings and Displacements**

Samson Occom, "Temperance and Morality Sermon" in *Early Native Literacies in New England: A*

*Documentary and Critical Anthology*, eds. Kristina Bross and Hilary E. Wyss (University of Massachusetts 2008), 57-63. [on Reserve]

David Silverman, *Red Brethren: The Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 43-60, 107-124. [on Reserve]

#### Week 8

##### Tuesday **Old Lights and Liberal Protestantism**

Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England* (Boston, 1743), 1-21, 34-43 [on Google Books]

Timothy Cutler, *Letters* [on Reserve]

##### Thursday **Slavery and Freedom**

Film: "Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North" (Ebb Pod Productions)

Rebecca Warren Brown, *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear, a Native of Africa, Who was Enslaved in Childhood, and Died in Boston, January 3, 1815...Aged 65 Years* (Boston, 1832).

[<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brownrw/menu.html>]

#### Week 9

##### Tuesday **The Jewish Community of Revolutionary Newport**

*The Jews of Rhode Island*, ed. George M. Goodwin, Ellen Smith (Brandeis, 2004), 1-39 [on Reserve]

##### Thursday **New Visions of the Past**

John L. Brooke, "Something of Our Ancestors," *The Refiner's Fire: the Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), ch 3 [on Reserve]

Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Vol. 1, ch 1. [on Reserve]

#### Week 10

##### Tuesday **Jean Cheverus and William Ellery Channing**

J. Huen-Dubourg, *Life of Cardinal Cheverus, Archbishop of Bordeaux, and formerly Bishop of Boston*, trans. E. Stewart (Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1839), 43-81, 97-114. [on Google Books]

William Ellery Channing, *Remarks on the Character and Writings of Fenelon* (London, 1830) [on Google Books]

##### Thursday **The Burning of the Charlestown Convent**

"Burning of the Charlestown Convent," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 12 August, 1834

(<http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/949.htm>)

Rebecca Reed, *Six Months in a Convent* (Boston, 1835) 3-11 (from the Introduction), 149-164.

#### Week 11

##### Tuesday **The Irish Diaspora**

John O'Kelly of Warren, Rhode Island, Letter of 1773 in *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan*, ed. Kerby Miller, et al. (Oxford University Press, 2003), 328-331 [on Reserve]

Edward J. O'Day, "The 'Second Colonization of New England' Revisited: Irish Immigration Before the Famine" in *New Perspectives on the Irish Diaspora*, ed. Charles Fanning (Carbondale and Edwardsville Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 93-110 [on Reserve]

"Photo Essay: Building the Immigrant Church," in *Keeping Faith: European and Asian Catholic Immigrants*, ed. Jeffrey M. Burns, et al. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 87-92.

##### Thursday **Labor and Temperance**

Orestes Brownson, *The Convert, or Leaves from My Experience* (New York: E. Dunigan & Brother, 1857) Chs VI-VII, XVII-XVIII. [on Reserve]

Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography, correspondence, etc., of Lyman Beecher, D. D. Ed.* (New York: Harper,

1864) chs. XXVII, XXXVII, LVII [on Google Books]

Week 12

Tuesday **Sisters and Urban Life**

Hasia R. Diner, "The Web of Support: Sisters of Service" in *Erin's Daughters: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Johns Hopkins, 1983), 120-138.

Thursday **Memory**

Francis Bremer, "The Puritan Legacy," in *Puritanism: A Very Short Introduction* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 97-109.

John F. Kennedy, "City on a Hill" speech at The State House, Boston, January 9, 1961 (audio file, URL: <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/OYhUZE2Qo0-ogdV7ok900A.aspx>)

\*\*Find and bring to class an example of someone using New England or local history for present-day purposes – e.g., a local commemoration, tribal celebration, narrative of Thanksgiving Day, citation of Roger Williams, etc.

Week 13

Tuesday **Presentations and Review**