

RELIGION IN AMERICA

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Rationale for Course Syllabus

My participation in the Young Scholars in American Religion program could not have come at a better time. In 2004 I moved from a Catholic liberal arts college in the Northeast to a large public university on the border between the Midwest and the South. I also went from a sociology/anthropology department to a department of religious studies. I will teach “Religion in America” for the first time in the fall of 2005. Though my sociology of religion courses have often touched on the historical dimensions of American religion, I have focused primarily on the contemporary scene. In the YSAR sessions, I have enjoyed hearing how historians view the basic American religious history class.

At SMSU “Religion in America” is taught at the introductory level. Because the course meets a general education requirement, it is governed by a departmental document approved by the university’s general education committee. As described in the original proposal, “Religion in America” focuses on the history of “American religious movements and beliefs,” the interplay between “dominant and dissenting religious traditions,” the development of American religious thought, the relationship between religion and culture, the contributions of “minority and immigrant religious movements,” the use of sacred texts, and the impact of religion on American public life.

In constructing my own version of the course, I have followed the departmental guidelines while drawing on my training as a sociologist. From the very beginning, my goal was to design a course that covers the basics of American religious history while asking larger sociological questions.

Most sociologists of religion interpret American history through the narrative of secularization theory and/or the storylines that have arisen to challenge it (see James Spickard, “What is Happening to Religion? Six Sociological Narratives”). Couched as a counter-secularization narrative, Finke and Stark’s *The Churching of America* is perhaps the best-known attempt to put a sociological spin on American religious history. Following the example of sociologist Julie Ingersoll (who taught at SMSU until 2001), I considered using Finke and Stark as my textbook for “Religion in America.” After giving the 2005 edition of the book a fresh read, I concluded that it was too difficult for an introductory course. While intellectually provocative, it is too preoccupied with rational choice theory and the numerical growth and decline of Christian denominations (despite a section on new immigrant religions in the second edition) to serve as a broad introduction to religion and American culture.

I turned next to the half-dozen or so American religious history textbooks on the market. While I learned a lot about the teaching of American religion, I soon concluded that most of these texts would not work for my purposes. The books that best captured the social and cultural dimensions of American religion seemed too difficult for an introductory class at a public university. The books designed for a more general audience were not very sociological. At least one did not mention the word “secularization” at all.

Given my frustration, I was delighted to come across George Marsden’s *Religion and American Culture*. Marsden’s text is organized around the interplay between the religious and the secular in American life. It discusses secularism and secularization in at least nine places, including a section on “Understanding Secularization.” In the words of a perceptive reviewer, *Religion and American Culture* articulates a strong thesis, namely that the United States is “both remarkably religious and remarkably secular.” Whether my students agree or disagree with this claim, it will give us something to argue about. Designed as a supplementary text for a standard American history course, Marsden’s textbook also has the virtue of being brief. This is important in a university where 10-12 pages of reading per class is the norm for introductory courses.

Like Martha Finch (YSAR in 2003-04 and my colleague at SMSU), I have decided to adopt Patrick Allitt’s *Major Problems in American Religious History*. Allitt’s reader includes a broader range of religious groups than Marsden’s text, giving more space to the contributions of native Americans, American Jews, new immigrant religions, women, and minorities. While Marsden stresses the tensions between the Protestant establishment and a succession of religious challengers, Allitt highlights the diversity of American religions. Together, they allow me to cover the both the dominant and dissenting religious traditions in America.

To round out the course’s sociological treatment of American religious history, I have added an excerpt from *The Churching of America* (found in the Allitt reader) and James Spickard’s paper on competing narratives in the sociology of religion. My goal is to have students to grapple with different ways of telling the story of religion in America.

Finally, in the interest of geographical relevance, I have included periodic readings and assignments on religion in Missouri (usually from the internet). At Holy Cross I used Massachusetts Catholicism to illustrate larger themes in the sociology of American Catholicism. At SMSU, I would like to use the “little stories” of religion in Missouri to tell the “big story” of American religion (if there is such a story). The syllabus includes readings on Ozark religion, religion in St. Louis, and the Cherokee experience of the “trail of tears” (which passed right through Springfield). One of the three paper assignments requires students to visit a religious congregation in the greater Springfield area.

Religious Studies 131: Religion in America

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What role has religion played in American culture and history? How have the many religions in the United States managed to get along? Is America a secular or a religious country? What is the relationship between religion and public affairs? These topics are explored in “Religion in America.” This course does not pretend to offer a definitive answer to such questions. Instead, it offers you the tools to investigate them for yourself.

There have been many attempts to tell the story of religion in America. Many scholars emphasize the *secularization* of American life, arguing that religion has become less and less important in our society. Others believe that we have grown *more religious* over the past 200 years, highlighting what they call the “Churching of America.” Still others celebrate the *amazing diversity* of American religion, focusing on the spiritual journeys of native peoples, immigrants, and African-Americans. In “What is Happening to Religion? Six Sociological Narratives” sociologist James Spickard summarizes these conflicting approaches, arguing that that “each of these stories is plausible” and that few scholars “are wedded to any single story.”

In this course, we will consider the multiple storylines that have been used to make sense of American religious history. Your job is to determine which storylines make the most sense to you. You need not be wedded to a single story.

This course counts as a General Education course in the area of “Understanding of Culture and Society.” As such it focuses on the *relationship between religion and American culture*. In addition to this overarching goal, this class has a number of other aims. In this course, you will:

1. Discover the diversity of American religious movements and institutions
2. Learn about the dominant and dissenting religious traditions in American history
3. Investigate the boundary between the sacred and the secular in American culture
4. Explore the place of religion in American politics
5. Consider the evidence for and against the claim the U.S. has become more secular
6. Learn to appreciate the religious history of Missouri

Required Texts

George Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001).

Patrick Allitt, *Major Problems in American Religious History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

Web Readings: These are an essential part of the class. They are not optional.

Attendance Policy: Attendance is required at all class meetings. The only acceptable excuses for absences are emergencies, official university activities (with a written excuse) or illness (please contact the instructor in such cases). Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. Please be punctual because our time is limited.

Class Participation (25 points): Students will be evaluated on their participation in class discussions. Students will be assessed on their familiarity with the readings.

Quizzes (75 points): Periodic pop quizzes will be administered in this class. They will be on the reading assigned for the day and/or the previous lecture.

Paper #1 (100 points): Thomas Jefferson/Elizabeth Cady Stanton Bibles

Thomas Jefferson's *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth Extracted Textually from the Gospels* (1820) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* (1892 and 1895) are two attempts by prominent Americans to alter and/or critique the Bible to fit a new religious vision. Students will write a 6-8 page paper comparing the ways Jefferson and Stanton dealt with a passage chosen from the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (students may pick any passage they wish as long as both Jefferson and Stanton address it). Papers should explain why Jefferson and Stanton altered and/or critiqued the biblical passage in the way that they did. This assignment is due on **Monday October 3**. See separate handout on this paper with web links for the Jefferson/Stanton Bibles.

Paper #2 (100 points): Local Congregation Visit

Students will visit a local congregation to observe a religious service. They should choose a congregation from a tradition other than their own. Students will write a 6-8 page paper describing the religious practices, beliefs, social composition, and material culture of the congregation. Papers should relate observations of local religious life to what we have been covering in the course. This paper is due on **Monday November 7**. See separate handout on this paper.

Paper #3 (100 points): Religion in the *New York Times*

Students will write a 6-8 page paper analyzing the coverage of religion in five days of the *New York Times* (available free in the bookstore and the Plaster Student Union convenience store). Papers should connect the themes of this course (especially those of the final unit) to the forms of religion that appear in the *Times*. Students should discuss which storylines of religion in America (see the Spickard, Marsden, Stark/Finke and Sundberg readings in the syllabus) make the most sense of what they read in the newspaper. This paper is due on **Monday December 12**. See separate handout on this paper.

Examinations (600 points total; 200 points each): There will be three examinations in this course. They will test students only on the units leading up to the examination. The final will not be cumulative. Examinations will be a mixture of matching, multiple choice, short answer and essay questions.

Total Number of Points: 1,000

The following grading scale will be used:

A=90-100%
B=80-89%
C=70-79%
D=60-79%
F=Below 60%

If a student is on the border of a grade, the instructor will take into consideration the overall performance of the student, class participation, and amount of improvement.

Academic Honesty Policy: SMSU is a community of scholars committed to developing educated persons who accept the responsibility to practice personal and academic integrity. You are responsible for knowing and following SMSU's student honor code, *Student Academic Integrity Policies and Procedures*, available at www.smsu.edu/acadaff/AcademicIntegrity.html and also available at the Reserves Desk in Meyer Library. Any student participating in any form of academic dishonesty will be subject to sanctions as described in this policy.

Non-Discrimination Policy: SMSU is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution, and maintains a grievance procedure available to any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against. At all times, it is your right to address inquiries or concerns about possible discrimination to Jana Estergard, Equal Opportunity Officer, Siceluff Hall 296, (417)836-4252. Other types of concerns (i.e., concerns of an academic nature) should be discussed directly with your instructor and can also be brought to the attention of your instructor's Department Head.

Policy on Disability Accommodations: To request academic accommodations for a disability, contact Katheryne Staeger-Wilson, Director, Disability Services, Plaster Student Union, Suite 405, (417)836-4192 or (417)836-6792 (TTY), www.smsu.edu/disability. Students are required to provide documentation of disability to Disability Services prior to receiving accommodations. Disability Services refers some types of accommodation requests to the Learning Diagnostic Clinic, which also provides diagnostic testing for learning and psychological disabilities. For information about testing, contact Dr. Steve Capps, Director, Learning Diagnostic Clinic, (417)836-4787, www.smsu.edu/contrib/ldc.

Religion at a State University: Consistent with Supreme Court decisions regarding the teaching of religion at public institutions (*Abington v. Schempp* 1963), this course approaches the study of religion from a non-confessional standpoint. We will focus on describing and analyzing the place of religion in American culture, rather than arguing for one religious tradition or another. Students are free to express or not to express their own beliefs in class. Students will be evaluated strictly on the quality of their written work and class participation, not their religious views.

Cell Phone Policy: Consistent with university policy, the use of cell phones in class is prohibited. Cell phones must be turned to “silent” mode during class.

Office Hours: Monday 3-5 p.m.; Tuesday 2-4 p.m.; Thursday 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Expectations for Reading: Students must complete the reading for each day *before* coming to class. The readings will serve as the basis for lectures, discussions, and pop quizzes. The amount of reading will range from 10-25 pages per day, averaging about 12 pages per day.

Introduction: Setting the Stage

Monday August 22: Introducing the Course

Wednesday August 24: The Religious and the Secular in American History

Reading: Marsden, 1-7

Questions: What is “religion”? What is the “secular”? What is “American culture”?

Part I: The Religious and the Secular in Colonial America

Friday August 26: Native American and European Religious Worlds

Reading: Bernal Diaz del Castillo in Allitt, 25-27; Roger Williams in Allitt, 32-34.

Questions: What happened when Native American and European worlds collided? How did power dynamics shape the relationship between native peoples and white colonists?

Monday August 29: From Reformation Europe to Puritan New England

Reading: Marsden, 15-30.

Reading: John Harvard in Allitt, 64-65; Cotton Mather in Allitt, 72-75.

Web Resource: “Religion and the Founding of the American Republic—Part I”

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel01.html>

Questions: Was Puritan New England a “secular” or “religious” society?

Wednesday August 31: Revivalism and the Birth of American Evangelicalism

Reading: Marsden, 31-38.

Reading: Nathan Cole in Allitt, 95-99; Phyllis Wheatley in Allitt, 99-100.

Web Resource: “Religion and the Founding of the American Republic—Part II”

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel02.html>

Questions: What was new about the Great Awakening? About Whitefield’s preaching?

Friday September 2: Religion, Revolution, and the Founding Fathers

Reading: Marsden, 38-55

Reading: Benjamin Franklin in Allitt, 100-101; Thomas Jefferson in Allitt, 109-110.

Questions: What were the religious beliefs of Jefferson and Franklin? Do their writings confirm or disconfirm what you “know” about the founding fathers?

Part II: Dominant and Dissenting Voices in the Early Nineteenth Century

Wednesday September 7: Christianizing America

Reading: Marsden, 57-74.

Reading: Charles Finney in Allitt, 132-34.

Web Resource: “Religion and the Founding of the American Republic—Part VII”
<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html>

Questions: What innovations did the Second Great Awakening introduce? Do you recognize any of them in today’s American Christianity?

Friday September 9: Slave Religion

Reading: Marsden, 74-79.

Reading: Albert Raboteau in Allitt, 152-59.

Film: Excerpts from “This Far By Faith”

Questions: How did African-Americans relate their beliefs to European Christianity? How was the Christianity of African-Americans different from that of whites?

Monday September 12: Native Americans Exiled

Reading: Marsden, 80-83.

Web Reading: John Burnett’s Story of the Trail of Tears
<http://www.chokeee.org/Culture/HistoryPage.asp?ID=128>

Questions: Relate the “trail of tears” to Missouri and Oklahoma geography.

Wednesday September 14: Catholic and Jewish Immigrants

Reading: Marsden, 83-87.

Reading: John Francis Maguire in Allitt, 168-71; Benjamin Roth in Allitt, 172-74.

Questions: What difficulties did Catholics and Jews encounter? How did they “keep the faith”?

Friday September 16: Homegrown American Religions

Reading: Marsden, 87-97.

Reading: Lucy Wright in Allitt, 127-29; Joseph Smith in Allitt, 134-37.

Questions: How did the Shakers and the Mormons reinterpret Protestant Christianity? Relate Mormons to Missouri geography.

Monday September 19: Ethno-Religious Politics in Antebellum America

Reading: Marsden, 97-104.

Reading: Maria Monk document in Allitt, 165-68; Frederick Douglass in Allitt, 179-80.

Questions: What were the ethno-religious divisions in American politics? How was religion mobilized in the debate over slavery?

Wednesday September 21: Examination #1

Part III: Religious Insiders and Outsiders in Postbellum America

Friday September 23: Capitalism and Secularization in the Gilded Age

Reading: Marsden, 105-22.

Reading: Russell Conwell in Allitt, 273-74.

Questions: What does Marsden mean by secularization? Is Conwell's "Acres of Diamonds" a secular or religious sermon?

Monday September 26: Feminists and Social Gospelers

Reading: Marsden, 122-30.

Reading: Elizabeth Cady Stanton in Allitt, 270-71; George Herron in Allitt, 272-73.

Questions: What was the relationship between religion and feminism? Socialism and Protestant liberalism?

Wednesday September 28: Protestant Modernism

Reading: Marsden, 130-40.

Reading: Lyman Abbott in Allitt, 261-63; Washington Gladden in Allitt, 266-68.

Questions: Was Protestant modernism a secularizing or a revitalizing movement?

Friday September 30: Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy in Protestant America

Reading: Marsden, 141-52.

Reading: Robert Orsi in Allitt, 245-49.

Web Reading: Read about the Italian neighborhood of St. Louis (especially its churches).
<http://stlouis.missouri.org/neighborhoods/history/thehill/index13.htm>

Questions: Compare Orsi's Italian Harlem to "the Hill" neighborhood in St. Louis. How did Italian Catholics relate to Irish Catholics? To Protestants?

Monday October 3: Ethnic Protestant Immigrants in Missouri and the Midwest

Web Resource: "In the Face of the West Wind: Rural Churches in the Midwest."

http://www.elca.org/archives/ruralchurches/rural_churches.html

Web Resource: Article on German Lutheranism in Freistatt, Missouri.

<http://springfield.news-leader.com/news/walkingtheozarks/20050201-InlaidbackFreis.html>

Questions: How did ethnic Protestant immigrants differ from the Protestant mainstream?

****Paper #1 on Jefferson/Stanton Bibles Due****

Wednesday October 5: Jewish America

Reading: Marsden, 152-57.

Reading: Abraham Cahan in Allitt, 239-41; Anzia Yeziarska in Allitt, 241-44.

Questions: Compare the experiences of Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant immigrants.

Friday October 7: African-American Christianity

Reading: Marsden, 157-63.

Web Reading: "1863-1945: From Emancipation to Jim Crow."

http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/journey_3/p_1.html

Film: Excerpts from "This Far By Faith."

Questions: How did the African-American church change after the Civil War?

Monday October 10: Holiness and Pentecostal Churches

Reading: Marsden, 163-70.

Web Reading: Vinson Synan, "The Origins of the Pentecostal Movement."

<http://www.oru.edu/university/library/holyspirit/pentorg1.html>

Questions: Relate Pentecostalism to Springfield and the Greater Ozarks.

Wednesday October 12: New Religious Movements

Reading: Marsden, 170-76.

Reading: Mary Baker Eddy in Allitt, 232-34; Charles Taze Russell in Allitt, 209-10.

Questions: What role do charismatic founders play in the birth of a religious movement?

Part IV: Conservative versus Liberal Religion

Friday October 14: Conservative Protestants in Modern America

Reading: Marsden, 177-88.

Reading: Charles Reagan Wilson in Allitt, 219-25.

Questions: How was Southern Protestantism different from Northern Protestantism?

Monday October 17: Fundamentalists versus Modernists

Reading: Marsden, 188-98.

Film: Excerpts from “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory.”

Wednesday October 19: Building a Catholic Subculture

Reading: Marsden, 198-204.

Reading: Clara Grillo in Allitt, 291-93.

Web Reading: History of St. Louis Archdiocese, 1903-1946

<http://www.archstl.org/history/chap4.html>

Questions: Relate subcultural Catholicism to St. Louis.

Monday October 24: Secularization and Neo-Orthodoxy

Reading: Marsden, 204-223.

Questions: What is secularization? What is neo-orthodoxy?

Web Resource: “Moral Man and Immoral Society: The Public Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr.” <http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/niebuhr/index.shtml>

Wednesday October 26: Examination #2

Part V: Religion in Post-World War II America

Friday October 28: “What Story Are We In?” Six Sociological Narratives

Web Reading: Spickard, “What is Happening to Religion? Six Sociological Narratives.”

http://www.ku.dk/satsning/Religion/indhold/publikationer/working_papers/what_is_happened.PDF

The purpose of this class is to set the stage for the rest of the semester. Pay close attention to the six sociological narratives described in the Spickard reading. They will provide the basis for our discussion of post-World War II American religion.

October 31: World War II and the Postwar Revival

Reading: Marsden, 223-29.

Reading: Billy Graham in Allitt, 465-68.

Questions: Compare Billy Graham to the fundamentalists of the 1920s.

Wednesday November 2: Jewish Identity and the American Way of Life

Reading: Marsden, 229-33.

Reading: Will Herberg in Allitt, 305-08.

Web Reading: Read at least two “Judaism in the Ozarks” Oral History Interviews
http://history.smsu.edu/mcooper/oral_hist/judaism.htm

Questions: Apply Herberg to the experiences of Springfield Jews.

Friday November 4: The Mainstreaming of American Catholics

Reading: Marsden, 233-38.

Film: Fulton J. Sheen Television Program.

Questions: How did Sheen make Catholicism more attractive to non-Catholics?

Monday November 7: Field Visit Debriefing

Web Reading: Stanley Burgess, “Perspectives on the Sacred: Religion in the Ozarks.”
<http://thelibrary.springfield.missouri.org/lochist/periodicals/ozarkswatch/ow202d.htm>

Discussion: Religion in Springfield

Questions: What can we say about religion in Springfield?

****Paper #2 on Visit to Local Religious Congregation Due****

Wednesday November 9: Religion and the Civil Rights Movement

Reading: Marsden, 238-45.

Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr. in Allitt, 360-62

Audio Resource: *Sing For Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Its Songs* (Smithsonian Folkways Records).

Questions: What role did the black church play in the civil rights movement?

Friday November 11: The Transformation of Mainline Protestantism

Reading: Marsden, 247-55.

Web Reading: Johnson, Hoge, and Luidens, “Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for the Decline.” <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9303/articles/johnson.html>

Questions: Why is mainline Protestantism declining in numbers?

Monday November 14: The Transformation of American Catholicism

Reading: Marsden, 255-60.

Web Reading: Dinges, Gonzales, Hoge, Johnson, “A Faith Loosely Held.” http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/article.php?id_article=329

Questions: Compare the experiences of Catholics and mainline Protestants.

Wednesday November 16: Feminism and Contemporary American Religion

Reading: Marsden, 260-63.

Reading: Carol Christ in Allitt, 409-12.

Web Reading: “Christians for Biblical Equality.” http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/about/who_we_are.shtml

Questions: Compare the feminism of Carol Christ with the feminism of Christians for Biblical Equality.

Friday November 18: Religion in a New Age

Reading: Marsden, 263-68.

Web Reading: David Embree, “The Ozarks: Buckle of the Bible Belt or Haven for Religious Diversity?” http://ozarkswatch.smsu.edu/v12n34/art01_01.asp

Questions: What role do new religious movements play in the Ozarks?

Monday November 21: The Return of Conservative Protestants

Reading: Marsden, 268-281.

Reading: Ammerman in Allitt, 495-502; Evangelicals for Social Action in Allitt, 472-75.

Film: Excerpts from “With God on Our Side.”

Questions: Compare the New Christian Right with Evangelicals for Social Action.

Monday November 28: Culture Wars?

Reading: Marsden, 281-286.

Web Reading: David Brooks, "One Nation, Slightly Divisible."

<http://pages.towson.edu/sovadia/SOCI243%5COne%20Nation,%20Slightly%20Divisible.htm>

Questions: Is there a "culture war"? Is there a division between "red state" and "blue state" religion? The lecture will draw on recent critiques of the culture wars thesis.

Wednesday November 30: New Immigrant Religions in America

Reading: Marsden, 286-87.

Web Reading: Diana Eck, "The Challenge of Pluralism."

http://www.pluralism.org/research/articles/cop.php?from=articles_index

Web Reading: R. Stephen Warner, "Immigrants and the Faiths They Bring."

<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2946>

In-Class Multimedia Presentation: "On Common Ground: World Religions in America"

Questions: Compare the experiences of Christian and non-Christian immigrants.

Friday December 2: Muslim and Hindu Youth Adapt to America

Reading: Muslim Teenagers in Allitt, 440-44; Prema Kurien in Allitt, 444-48.

In-Class Multimedia Presentation: "On Common Ground: World Religions in America"

Questions: Compare the experiences of Hindu and Muslim youth.

Monday December 5: The "Churching of America" Thesis

Reading: Roger Finke and Rodney Stark in Allitt, 12-17.

Web Reading: Walter Sundberg, "Beyond the Mainline Tale."

<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9306/reviews/sundberg.html>

Handout: Martin Marty, Review of *The Churching of America*.

Question: Do you find the "Churching of America" thesis plausible? Marty's critique? How does the Finke/Stark storyline compare to Marsden's narrative?

Wednesday December 7: The Religious and the Secular Revisited

Reading: Marsden, 288-90.

Web Reading: Spickard, “What is Happening to Religion? Six Sociological Narratives.”
http://www.ku.dk/satsning/Religion/indhold/publikationer/working_papers/what_is_happened.PDF

Reread Spickard’s “What’s Happening to Religion?” Which of the six narratives do you find most convincing?

****Paper #3 on Religion in the *New York Times* Due December 12****

Finals Period: Examination #3