

Beth S. Wenger Course Syllabus

Prepared for the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture by:

Beth S. Wenger
Department of History
University of Pennsylvania

The Center is pleased to share with you the syllabi for introductory courses in American religion that were developed in seminars led by Dr. Philip Gleason of the University of Notre Dame. In all of the seminar discussions, it was apparent that context, or the particular teaching setting, was an altogether critical factor in envisioning how students should be introduced to a field of study. The justification of approach, included with each syllabus, is thus germane to how you use the syllabus.

I. Syllabus Justification

This course is designed for graduate students in the University of Pennsylvania history department. At the University of Pennsylvania, there is currently no one teaching American religion, either in the religion or history departments. Our graduate students in history are talented and well-trained in social, political, and cultural history. Many of them are pursuing dissertation topics or will be teaching courses that in some way address issues of religion. I have created this course in order to provide graduate students with a grounding in American religious history that will inform their research and teaching interests.

The course is designed to introduce students to the theoretical innovations in the field of American religion and to suggest ways that the study of religion intersects with the social, cultural, and political narratives of American history. The course intentionally eschews a neat chronological framework and avoids focusing on individual religious movements. Rather, the seminar is organized thematically and theoretically in order to encourage students to think broadly about religion as a category of analysis in American history.

This is an advanced readings course in history and not a survey of American religion. The readings selected attempt to cover as many religious, racial, and ethnic groups as possible, but the course does not claim to provide a comprehensive survey of the wide spectrum of American religious culture. Rather than attempting to represent the diversity of American religious experience, the assigned readings have been chosen as examples of historical writing that incorporate religion as an analytical category. Issues of race, gender, and class will be highlighted within the context of each week's readings and not considered only within isolated weeks on the syllabus.

Many of the seminar sessions focus on one or two new books in American religious history. But for some topics, I have found it more useful to select a wide range of essays and articles rather than a particular monograph. The course generally emphasizes new scholarship. However, in order to give graduate students a sense of the evolution of the field of American religion, I have also included some essays that reveal the developments in the field over time.

I have targeted the writing assignments to the particular needs of graduate students. Students preparing for oral exams may choose to write a book review and an historiographical essay, while those who are

pursuing dissertation topics in the field may opt for a research project to fulfill the requirements of the course. Penn graduate students generally prepare for class very diligently and require few incentives to do so. I have, however, required students to lead at least one class session and to prepare questions that will circulate on a class e-mail list before each seminar session. The e-mail list will also provide an arena for discussion outside of the classroom

II. Introductory Course Syllabus

History 610 Spring 1998
Thursday: 3:00-5:00

RELIGION AND AMERICAN CULTURE

INSTRUCTOR: Beth S. Wenger OFFICE: 3401 Walnut, #361B
OFFICE HOURS: Tues. 3:00-5:00 PHONE: 898-5702
and by appointment E-MAIL: bwenger@sas.upenn.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is a readings course in religion and American culture. Designed primarily for graduate students in history, the seminar will emphasize the social and cultural dimensions of American religion. It is intended to introduce students to the theoretical innovations in the field of American religion and to suggest ways that the study of religion intersects with the social, cultural, and political narratives of American history.

The course intentionally eschews a neat chronological framework and avoids focusing on individual religious movements. Rather, the seminar is organized thematically and theoretically in order to encourage students to think broadly about religion as a category of analysis in American history.

The readings selected attempt to cover as many religious, racial, and ethnic groups as possible, but the course does not claim to provide a comprehensive survey of the wide spectrum of American religious culture. Rather than attempting to represent the diversity of American religious experience, the assigned readings have been chosen as examples of historical writing that incorporate religion as an analytical category. Issues of race, gender, and class will be highlighted within the context of each week's readings and not considered only within isolated weeks on the syllabus.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students are expected to prepare thoroughly for each class session and be able to evaluate and discuss all the readings. Class participation is an essential requirement of the seminar. One or two students will lead the class discussion each week and should distribute a list of questions for discussion to all seminar participants at least one day before class. (This may be done by e-mail, using a listserv that we will set up for the class. This listserv will also serve as a forum for discussion.)

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

Choose one of the two options listed below:

OPTION 1: HISTORIOGRAPHY

ASSIGNMENT 1 BOOK REVIEW DUE MAR. 5

A 5-7 page critical review of one or two books of your choice. This review should evaluate the book or books that you choose, assess the methodology and structure of the arguments presented, and consider the impact upon the field.

ASSIGNMENT 2 HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY DUE MAY 1

An historiographical essay of 20-30 pages on a topic of your choice. The paper might evaluate the historiography of a particular religious movement or group or explore a theoretical or methodological issue. If appropriate, you might also consider the ways that including religion as a category of analysis alters our understanding of a particular period in American history.

OPTION 2: RESEARCH

ASSIGNMENT 1 RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE MAR. 5

A 5-7 page proposal outlining a research project. The research paper that you will produce at the end of the semester might evaluate a particular movement, incident, issue, or period in American religious history. You may choose your own topic and define the project according to your own needs and interests. This initial proposal should outline the topic that you have chosen, provide a preliminary bibliography, indicate the source material you will use, and suggest the central issues and arguments of your research.

ASSIGNMENT 2 RESEARCH PAPER DUE MAY 1

A 20-30 page research paper on a topic of your choice that follows the proposal submitted earlier in the semester.

GRADING:

Book Review/Research Proposal 35%
Historiographical Essay/Research Paper 45%
Class Preparation and Participation 20%

REQUIRED BOOKS

(available at House of Our Own Bookstore and also on reserve in the library)

- Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*
- Colleen McDannel, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*
- Leigh Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays*
- Robert Orsi, *Thank you St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*
- Milton Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration.*
- John McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North*

- John Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture*
- Margaret Lambert Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present*
- Linda Kintz, *Between Jesus and the Market: The Emotions That Matter in Right-Wing America*
- Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*
- Mark Silk, *Unsecular Media: Making News of Religion in America* -Thomas Tweed, ed., *Retelling U.S. Religious History*

* An additional packet of readings will be available for purchase at Wharton Reprographics.

Two assigned books are currently out-of-print:

- Jenna Weissman Joselit and Susan Braunstein, eds., *Getting Comfortable in New York: The American Jewish Home, 1880-1950*
- Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America*

These books are available on reserve and you may also inquire about purchasing them through Book Depot (1-800-438-2750)

COURSE SCHEDULE

JAN. 15: Introduction: Religion and the Narratives of American History

[Discussion of the goals and themes of the course]

Some historiographical background on the study of American religion

Henry May, "The Recovery of American Religious History" *American Historical Review* 70 (October 1964): 79-92.

Sydney Ahlstrom, "The Problem of the History of Religion in America," *Church History* 39 (June 1970): 224-35.

John F. Wilson, "A Review of Some Reviews of A Religious History of the American People by Sydney E. Ahlstrom," *Religious Studies Review* (September 1975): 1-8.

[Familiarize yourself with Sydney Ahlstrom's classic work, *A Religious History of the American People*, as well some of the key general surveys of American religious history, such as: Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*; Mary Bednarowski, *American Religion: A Cultural Perspective*; Edwin Gaustad, *A Documentary History of Religion in America* (2 vols.); George Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*.]

JAN. 22: A Christian America

-Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*

JAN. 29: Religion. and Material Culture

-Colleen McDannel, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*
-Jenna Weissman Joselit, "A Set Table': Jewish Domestic Culture in the New World, 1880-1950," and
Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kitchen Judaism," in Jenna Weissman Joselit and Susan Braunstein, eds.,
Getting Comfortable in New York: The American Jewish Home, 1880-1950, pp. 19-105.

Recommended: Colleen McDannel, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*

FEB. 5: Religion and Consumer Culture

-Leigh Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays*

Recommended Lawrence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* Andrew
Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American
Identity*

FEB. 12: Religion and Popular Culture

-Robert Orsi, *Thank you, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*
-David Chidester, "The Church of Baseball, the Fetish of Coca-Cola, and the Potlatch of Rock 'n' Roll:
Theoretical Models for the Study of Religion in American Popular Culture, *AAR: Journal of the American
Academy of Religion* 64:4 (Winter 1996): 743-65.

Recommended:

-Robert J. Higgs, *God in the Stadium: Sports and Religion in America*
-Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*

FEB. 19: Race, Religion, and Community I

-Milton Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration.*

FEB. 26: Race, Religion and Community II

-John McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban
North*

Recommended: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the
Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*

MAR. 5: Sacred Spaces/Holy Places

-Peter Williams, "Religious Architecture and Landscape," in Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, eds.,
Encyclopedia of American Religious Experience: Studies of Traditions and Movements, pp. 1325-39.
-Rowland A. Sherril, "American Sacred Space and the Contest of History," in David Chidester and Edward
T. Linenthal eds., *American Sacred Space*, pp. 313-340.
-Jeanne Kilde, "Sacralizing the Auditorium Church, 1870-1910: Viewing Sacred Space as Cultural
Process" (forthcoming)
-James R. Curtis, "Miami's Little Havana: Yard Shrines, Cult Religion, and Landscape, *Journal of Cultural
Geography* 1.1. (Fall/Winter 1980): 1-15.
-Paula Kane, *Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900-1920* pp. 108-44 (on Catholic
architecture).

For the personal use of teachers. Not for sale or redistribution.
©Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, 1999

-John Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture*, Chpts 1-4.

Recommended: Lester Vogel, *To See A Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in Nineteenth Century America*.

MAR. 19: Immigrants, Ethnicity, and American Religion

Changing Historiographical Perspectives on Religion and Ethnicity:

-Martin Marty, "Ethnicity: The Skeleton of Religion in America," *Church History* 41: 1 (March 1972), 5-21.

-Harry Stout, "Ethnicity: The Vital Center of Religion in America," *Ethnicity* 2 (June 1975): 204-24.

-Jay Dolan, "The Immigrants and their Gods: A New Perspective in American Religious History," *Church History* 57 (1988): 61-72.

-Case Studies in American Ethnic Cultures:

*[In addition to reading these essays, all students should choose a book or an article that treats an ethnic group and be prepared to discuss how an analysis of religious culture, practice, or ideology might inform the writing of ethnic histories]:

Wesley Woo, "Chinese Protestants in the San Francisco Bay Area," in Sucheng Chan ed.,

Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943, pp.

George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican, Becoming American: Ethnicity Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, esp. Chpt. 7.

Deborah Dash Moore, "A Synagogue Center Grows in Brooklyn," in Jack Wertheimer, ed. *The American Synagogue A Sanctuary Transformed*, pp.297-326.

Karen McCarthy Brown, "The Power to Heal in Haitian Vodou: Reflections on Women, Religion, and Medicine," in David G. Hackett, ed., *Religion and American Culture: A Reader*, pp. 481-94.

Recommended: Ramon Gutierrez and Genevieve Fabre, eds., *Feasts and Celebrations in North American Ethnic Communities*

MAR. 26: Religion and Oppositional Politics

-Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America*

-Dwight Billings, "Religion as Oppositional: A Gramscian Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* 96: 1 (July 1990), 1-31.

-Leo Ribuffo, "God and Contemporary Politics," (Review Article) *Journal of American History* 79 (March 1993), 1515-1533.

Recommended: Robert H. Craig, *Radical Religion and Radical Politics: An Alternative Christian Tradition in the United States*

APR. 2: Religion, Fundamentalism, and the Right

-Margaret Lambert Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present*

-Linda Kintz, *Between Jesus and the Market: The Emotions That Matter in Right-Wing America*

-Grant Wacker, "Searching for Eden with a Satellite Dish: Primitivism, Pragmatism, and the Pentecostal Character," in David G. Hackett, ed., *Religion and American Culture: A Reader*, pp. 439-58.

APR. 9: Religion in Post-World War II America

-Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*

APR. 16: Religion and Media

-Mark Silk, *Unsecular Media: Making News of Religion in America*

Selected Video clips (TV ministry, Nightline, sitcoms and dramas)

Recommended: Sean Wilentz, "The Trials of Televangelism," in Nicolaus Mills, ed., *Culture in an Age of Money: The Legacy of the 1980s in America*, pp.

APR. 23: New Narratives/ New Paradigms?

-Thomas Tweed, ed., *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, (esp. essays by Tweed, Taves, and Braude).

-David Wills, "The Central Themes of American Religious History: Pluralism, Puritanism, and the Encounter of Black and White," *Religion and Intellectual Life* 5 (Fall 1987): 30-41.

-Jon Butler, "Historiographical Heresy: Catholicism as a Model for American Religious History," in Thomas Kselman, ed., *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion*, pp. 286-309.

-Michael Zuckerman, "'Holy Wars, Civil Wars: Religion and Economics in Nineteenth Century America,' *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 16 (1991): 205-40.

-Stephen J. Stein, "'Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Left to Do': Choosing a Textbook for Religion in America," *Religion and American Culture* 3 (Summer 1993): 217-27.

Recommended: David G. Hackett, ed., *Religion and American Culture: A Reader* (a new collection of short essays by contemporary scholars, very useful for teaching.)