

Diana Butler Bass Course Syllabus

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

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The Center is pleased to share with you the syllabi for introductory courses in American religion that were developed in seminars led by Dr. Harry S. Stout of Yale University. 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

Rationale for Religious Studies 123: American Christianity

This syllabus and course was organized while I taught in the religious studies department at Westmont College, a 1,200 student residential evangelical liberal arts college in Santa Barbara, California. Located in an extremely affluent and scenic locale, Westmont attracts upper middle class and upper class students. The 96% white student body makes it the least ethnically diverse college in California. Required to conform to a set of "Christian Life Expectations," students must take four religious studies courses (Old and New Testament, Christian doctrine and history of Christianity) and attend daily chapel. Almost all students profess to having a conversion experience and the vast majority are free church Protestants coming from such places as Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard Fellowships. The major denomination represented is the mainline Presbyterian Church (in California the PCUSA has a large evangelical wing).

This course, American Christianity, fulfilled the junior year requirement in religious history. As such, many non-majors enrolled. However, the course also attracted many majors--most of whom go onto seminary and graduate school. So, the students displayed various levels of competency and interest in the subject. The class, however, proved quite popular and was always over-subscribed (average class size: 40).

The title of the course, "American Christianity," was assigned to me by the department when I arrived. Obviously, the title alone selects and privileges one religious tradition. It was previously handled by an historical theologian who taught "the great tradition" of Protestant, white, male theologians with an emphasis on the development of evangelicalism.

In spite of such narrowness, I wanted to broaden the course and bring it more in line with American religious history. I understood this challenge in two ways: 1) to introduce students to a much broader conception of Christianity than had hitherto been taught, and 2) to include the broader American religious experience as was possible. Although in comparison to courses taught at secular universities in American religion it appears narrow, this was considered the "radical" course in my department. It represents my attempt to challenge evangelical students to understand Roman Catholicism, sectarianism and liberal

Protestantism as well as the experiences of non-white peoples and women. So, while Protestant Christianity still constitutes the central narrative of course content, there is a conscious and constant interplay in lectures and course structure between that tradition and others.

The style of the course is largely narrative history. I left theoretical issues for upper division majors-only courses. However, theoretical constructs are implicit: insiders vs. outsiders; feminist criticism; sociological analysis; intellectual history; secularization theories. I use different methodologies with different lectures weaving the most appropriate theory into the narrative. Although I understand methodological backgrounds, it constantly frustrated me that I sacrificed clear-cut methodological issues and problems in favor of coverage and narrative strength. This was simply a choice--one that follows my own historical strengths and one I thought would work well in the context.

The contextual distinctives in this course are obvious: I assigned work to cause students to (re)consider their own faith commitments, to push at the limits of the evangelical sub-culture, and to relate Christian beliefs to the larger world in a sophisticated fashion. I have often included provocative films, such as PBS's "Telegrams from the Dead" (on 19th century spiritualism), Bill Moyers' "The New Holy War" (on homosexuality and religion), and Randy Balmer's "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory" (critical of much of the evangelical sub-culture). Yet, throughout, I constantly sought for students to develop deeper Christian commitments and a greater sense of compassion.

At UCSB, where I now teach in the history department (intellectual history rather than religious history), I find most of my lectures appropriate to the state university setting (maybe this goes to show how "secularized" the content of American religious history courses has become! A new great tradition?) However, the assignments are much different. Students still prepare reading summaries--over many of the same primary sources--for discussion days. Some of the questions remain the same, but they are framed differently. Of the attached writing assignments, only the Harriet Beecher Stowe essay remains (substantially) intact. The distinctive faith exploration component has been replaced with more theoretical issues and greater emphasis on critical analysis.

II. Introductory Course syllabus

Religious Studies 123: AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

I. Course Goals and Objectives:

1. Present a broad survey of the history of Christianity in the United States.
2. Acquaint students with the contributions of the Christian tradition to American culture and the effects of American culture on Christian faith and practice.
3. Assess the role and importance of traditionally marginalized peoples and religious traditions in American Christianity.
4. Increase analytical and critical skills with primary and secondary sources and the ability to express those skills verbally and in writing.
5. Understand the relevance of historical debates regarding God, nature and society to current religious, social and political issues.

II. Course Texts:

- Mark A. Noll, History of Christianity in the United States and Canada.
- Robert Mathisen, The Role of Religion in American Life.
- Edmund Morgan, Puritan Dilemma.

- Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin.
- Randall Balmer, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory.
- Mark A. Noll, Nathan Hatch and George Marsden, The Search for Christian America.
- additional xeroxed readings

III. Course Requirements:

1. Attend lectures, students presentations and/or films.
2. Prepare reading summaries for the assigned text and reserve reading.
3. Submit four 4-5 page papers covering Morgan, Stowe, Balmer and Noll books.
4. Pass one final exam.

Reading Summaries, Attendance, and Discussion (20% of your grade). Reading summaries will cover the material listed in course outline (section V) and include both the text and primary works. They will be graded on a P/F basis. All P grades will count as a B in your final grade (unless you have an A average on all other work, then the P will count as an A). A sample guide for writing these summaries will be handed out. You may skip one reading summary without penalty. More than one skip will lower your grade. Class discussion will be held approximately every other week. Attendance will be taken. You must attend 5 of 6 discussion days to receive full credit (an A). If you miss more than one, your grade for this assignment will be lowered by one full grade for every discussion you miss. Excessive class cuts will be penalized.

Class papers (15% each; 60% of the grade). Directions for these papers are attached. Each paper is expected to be typed, well-presented, grammatically correct and without typos or spelling errors (no plastic covers, please!).

Final Exam (20% of the grade). The final exam will include both objective and essay sections which will cover all assigned readings and lecture materials.

Grading

Four 4-5 page papers on Morgan, Stowe, Balmer and Noll @ 15% each 60%

Reading Summaries 10%

Class discussion 10%

One final exam 20%

Total 100%

Scale:

100-99 = A+

98-94 = A

93-90 = A-

89-88 = B+

87-84 = B

83-80 = B-

79-78 = C+

77-74 = C

73-70 = C-

69-68 = D+

67-64 = D

63-60 = D-

below 60 = F

IV. Course Policies:

1. **Inclusive Language.** Because of the changing standards of English usage, I require you to use inclusive language whenever possible. Some simple guidelines include replacing "man" or "mankind" with "humanity," "humankind," "persons," or "people." "He," "him" and "his"--when not referring to an actual male person should be avoided by alternate sentence constructions or replaced with "he or she," "him or her," or "hers or his." Gender specific terms may be replaced by their current alternatives: "mailman" has been replaced by "letter carrier"; "policeman," "police officer," etc. The ending "-ess", such as "poetess," "authoress," or "deaconess" is now generally omitted.
2. **Cheating.** The penalty for cheating on an exam or an assignment is a course grade of F with no opportunity for withdrawal.
3. **Plagiarism.** Since you will be doing a good deal of writing in this class, it is vital that you acquaint yourself with rules regarding plagiarism. Plagiarism is the use of another person's words or ideas without giving that person proper credit. Any material borrowed from another source must be cited according to Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (available in the library). Plagiarism will result in an F for that assignment.

V. Course Outline (may be changed with instructor's discretion):

THE RELIGIOUS SETTLEMENT OF NORTH AMERICA

Jan 9 Introduction
Jan 11 Native American Religious Traditions
Jan 13 Catholic missions & European background
Jan 16 The Puritan Experience, Part I
Jan 18 The Puritan Experience, Part II
Jan 20 Virginia and the Anglican Vision; Morgan paper due
Jan 23 Catholics in Early America
Jan 25 The Quaker "Holy Experiment"
Jan 27 Discussion day. Topic I: Is it possible to establish a Christian commonwealth?
Assignment: Noll, 7-82; Math, 3-19; additional xeroxed readings

ENLIGHTENMENT AND NEW LIGHT: CHRISTIANITY IN THE 18TH CENTURY

Jan 30 George Whitefield, John Wesley & the Revivals
Feb 1 Jonathan Edwards
Feb 3 The American Enlightenment
Feb 6 The Religious World of Thomas Jefferson
Feb 8 Religion & Revolution
Feb 10 Discussion day. Topic II: Can Christians rebel against the government?
Assignment: Noll, 85-162; Math, 21-49; additional xeroxed readings

ANTEBELLUM AMERICA & EVANGELICAL DEMOCRACY

Feb 13 New Nation & Democratic Evangelicalism
Feb 15 The Revival Impulse: Methodist Growth/Charles Finney
Feb 17 Evangelical Social Reform
Feb 20 Protesters: Mormons and Other Utopian Visions
Feb 22 Romantic Protestantism: The Transcendentalists

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Feb 24 Catholics & Anti-Catholicism; Stowe paper due
Feb 27 African-American Christianity
Mar 1 Slavery and the Churches
Mar 3 Slavery and the Churches
Mar 6 Manifest Destiny and the West
Mar 8 Civil War
Mar 10 Discussion day. Topic III: Was American evangelicalism benevolent or imperial?
Focus your response on the slavery issue.
Assignment: Noll, 163-284 (skim 245-284); and 313-334; Math, 51-111, 127-143.

POST-CIVIL WAR CHALLENGES: PLURALISM, SCIENCE AND SOCIAL CRISIS

Mar 13 Science, History and the Bible: New Conceptions
Mar 15 Protestant Liberalism and Modernism
Mar 17 Immigration and the Growth of Non-Protestant Traditions
Mar 20 The Social Gospel
Mar 22 The Transformation of Conservative Protestantism
Mar 24 The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy
Mar 27-31: Spring Break
April 3 Discussion day. Topic IV: Who's right? The Fundamentalists or the Liberals?
Assignment: Noll, 286-310 and 335-421 (skim 390-421); Math, 147-153, 162-165, 181-189, 196-219, 237-245, 254-260; additional xeroxed readings.

INSIDERS OUT & OUTSIDERS IN: 20TH CENTURY SHIFTS

Apr 5 American Depression-Religious Depression? Marxists & Pentecostals
Apr 7 Transforming Liberalism: Neo-Orthodoxy
Apr 10 Reforming Fundamentalism: Neo-Evangelicalism. Balmer paper due
Apr 12 Religious Revival of the 1950s
Apr 14 Civil Rights & Black religion
Apr 17 Catholics & Charismatics in the Mainstream
Apr 19 The Challenge of Feminism
Apr 21 Discussion day. Topic V: What is the role of the church in expanding human rights?
Assignment: Noll, 423-530; Math, 301-321; additional xeroxed readings

END OF THE CENTURY: WHERE FROM HERE?

Apr 24 Religion in Contemporary America: "Secularization" & Radical Pluralism
Apr 26 Religion in Contemporary America: Piety and Politics
Apr 28 Discussion day. Course Wrap-up, Topic VI: What is the difference between Christianity in America and American Christianity? Is this relevant to contemporary issues?
Assignment: Noll, 531-553; Math, 331-354

Final Exam: May 2, 8:30-10:30 am. Noll, et al paper due as take-home section of final.

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