

History 485
Religion, Politics, and Society
In Modern U.S. History

Institutional Context

Purdue University is a large (roughly 40,000 students), land-grant institution whose campus of red brick, right-angle buildings and linear grid sits proudly on a bluff (or mound) in West Lafayette, Indiana, overlooking the mighty Wabash River. The school is known for agricultural and veterinary studies, and especially its extensive engineering program (hence the right-angle buildings and linear grid), but in recent years university officials have worked hard to increase the strength and profile of its other colleges. The history department has benefited immensely from this new emphasis, growing exponentially in size and influence within the College of Liberal Arts during the past ten years. I am excited to be part of the process. This growth spurt has not only meant a larger faculty, additional course offerings, and continued emphasis on graduate education, but also many more undergraduate history majors wanting a greater variety of seminar-style classes at the upper levels. Some of these students have switched over to history from other disciplines and schools (a few are disillusioned engineering students who decided they preferred “fulfillment” over financial gain), while others are liberal arts to the core.

Regardless of their background, I have found Purdue’s history undergraduates to be incredibly earnest and hardworking and eager to be challenged intellectually. The vast majority of them come from Indiana, with a large number claiming small towns and farming communities as home. Generally speaking, Purdue students tend to be more conservative in their political and cultural outlooks, at least in comparison to other state schools like Indiana University (I’ve had students tell me they picked Purdue over Indiana because they did not want to be schooled by hippies, radicals, and liberals in Bloomington). Purdue’s conservatism stems also from its commitment to the military (it boasts one of the largest ROTC programs) and a longstanding intellectual and financial relationship with the defense sector (most notably NASA). Campus Republicans tend to outnumber campus Democrats, much to the chagrin of many liberal arts professors.

Course Context

I have designed this course with my institutional context in mind. I was hired at Purdue to teach political history and post-1945 U.S. history, and I’ve welcomed that opportunity. The remarkable flexibility and collegiality in the department has allowed me to teach these subjects in broad contexts, but I’m careful never to stray too far from “political” history, and this course reflects that. I am also conscious of the average Purdue student’s background. While wanting to challenge and expand their understandings of politics, religion, society, and history, I prefer to nudge rather than bludgeon them with new knowledge and interpretations. In other words, I am sensitive to the fact that many (often *most*, because of their deep interest in the subject) of my students identify with conservative religious and political positions, either due to family roots or their own personal preferences. My goal each semester is to create a comfortable and supportive classroom environment, in which students are encouraged to revisit their own assumptions about politics and political history, challenge and debate other students on their opinions, and engage in dialogue with the readings and me without slipping into punditry.

In terms of my course’s curricular context, I intend for “Religion, Politics, and Society in Modern U.S. History” to take advantage of other strengths in my department. I have two colleagues—Frank Lambert and Susan Curtis—who offer religious history and the history of religion and politics courses that focus on the pre-1900 period. My course is designed as a sequel of sorts. I hope to

make it a permanent offering that follows Lambert's religion and politics class on the books. My department is also strong in twentieth-century U.S. social and cultural history, and I want my course to build on that, for instance by being deliberate in connecting religion and religious history to subjects taught by my colleagues—labor history, media, sport and popular culture, and race and gender.

Pedagogical Context

In part to make it something that ties in to other areas of departmental concentration, in part to make it stand out as something fresh and new, my course will emphasize linkages between religion and politics throughout twentieth century U.S. history. I will provide ample opportunity for students to wrestle with substantive definitions of religion and politics, contemplate the tangible, abstract, obscure, and muddled dimensions of both entities, and grapple with the ironies and contradictions, forces of reform and reaction, that arise when these two realms converge. However, in the main—and at a base level—I simply want to introduce students to an alternative history of twentieth century U.S. politics, one that places religion at the center of development, and of our understanding of this recent past. How do matters and machinations of faith shape grassroots political activism? Party allegiances, policy, and governance? State, regional, and national political culture? Here religion will not (as is often done by political historians) be cordoned off as an agent of change worthy of consideration only under exceptional circumstances and in rare moments, but rather be considered as a consistent, power player that always brings passion, dogma, and certainly drama to the political realm.

Practically speaking, I will attempt to integrate religion into twentieth-century U.S. political history by relying on both a chronological and thematic approach. While moving sequentially through key transformations running from the beginning to end of the century, I will also examine particular episodes and themes that illuminate important societal turns, power shifts already identified by scholars in the standard political history text. Specifically, this course will encourage students to think more deeply about the ways religious ideas, institutions, and individuals intersect with and weave through broad political developments like populism and progressivism, corporate and labor activism, the rise and decline of New Deal liberalism, war and American empire building, the power shift to the Sunbelt, urban and suburban power struggles, social movements of the Left and the Right, the politics of family, education, and community, civil rights and ethnic identity, conservatism and globalization. In the process of uncovering this missing strand of political history I hope to offer students a broader appreciation of how different manifestations and priorities of faith inform a diverse range of political actors depending on contexts defined by other factors like race, gender, class, region, and place. As much as the course moves historically in linear fashion, I want to leave students with a sense that the relationship between religion and politics was, is, and always will be a dynamic and contentious one in American society guided by contingencies as much as principles toward no predestined end.

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(or by appointment)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course provides both a chronological and thematic overview of the history of religion, politics and society in twentieth century America. While moving sequentially through key transformations running from the beginning to end of the century, we will also pause each week to examine particular episodes and themes that illuminate substantive and symbolic societal turns. Specifically, this course will encourage us to think more deeply about the ways religious ideas, institutions, and individuals intersect with and weave through broad political developments like populism and progressivism, corporate and labor activism, the rise and decline of New Deal liberalism, war and American empire building, the power shift to the Sunbelt, urban and suburban power struggles, social movements of the Left and the Right, the politics of family, education, and community, civil rights and ethnic identity, conservatism and globalization. The overarching goal of this course is to place religion at the center of political development in the twentieth century, and at the center of our understanding of this recent past. Here religion will not (as is often done by political historians) be cordoned off as an agent of change worthy of consideration only under exceptional circumstances and in rare moments, but rather be considered as a consistent, powerful player that always brings competing passions and interests, drama and controversy to the political realm.

This primary agenda will be accompanied by a couple of others. In addition to absorbing the historical “facts and figures” of religion and politics in the twentieth century (on which students will be tested), students will also be encouraged to encounter and critique different styles of historical writing, from biographies and autobiographies to traditional monographs, articles and essays to editorials. What makes “good writing”? “Good history writing”? What are the challenges inherent to writing effective religious and political history? This set of issues will be important for us to consider, because they lead to yet a final set of questions: how does one actually go about researching history? Writing it? In addition to taking time for extensive reading in this subject area, students will also be expected to complete a major term paper based on both primary and secondary sources. Students will begin this project early in the semester and, while in consultation with members of their peer group and me, see it through to its conclusion by the last week of class.

FORMAT:

This course will be multifaceted in its methodology. The instructor will provide historical context to each week’s readings and discussions through short lectures on Tuesdays. The majority of class time on Thursdays will be spent in a less formal, collective engagement with the readings, film clips, and music selections. Students will be required to acquaint themselves with general historical developments in the period through survey textbooks and/or the internet (there are numerous resources on both of these fronts). Moreover, all students will be expected to attend class and to do so prepared to discuss the required readings and, if relevant, required multimedia.

REQUIRED READING:

- R. Marie Griffith and Melani McAllister, *American Quarterly* Special Issue, “Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States” (September 2007)
- Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004)
- Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006)
- Matthew Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007)
- Mary Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade Against Communism* (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 2008)
- David Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004)
- Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998)
- Steven Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009)
- Jerry Falwell, *Strength for the Journey: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987)

In addition, you will be required to complete assigned primary and secondary source readings in the Course Packet.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS/WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

Breakdown of Grades:

- 20% Participation
 - [10% Attendance and Discussion]
 - [10% Group Work/Research Presentation]
- 20% Two Review Essays
 - [10% Review #1]
 - [10% Review #2]
- 20% Late-term Exam
- 40% Research Paper

Participation and Films:

Students are expected to be present at all lecture, discussion, and workshop sections, and to be prepared to participate actively in these settings. Films assigned for discussion section should be watched in advance of the weekly meeting. Students should analyze films with the same rigor as reading assignments—as historical documents and as cultural texts—taking notes in preparation for discussion section and in anticipation of graded assignments.

Late-term Exam:

Late in the semester you will be asked to write an **in-class exam that will consist of three sections:** short answer, identification and essay. In the identification section you will be asked to define and explain some of the most critical terms highlighted in class—either during lectures, discussions, or in our films and readings. In the essay section you will be asked to write an essay response to one of two possible essay questions that will be provided for you in advance.

Writing Assignments:

Please be aware that this will be a reading- and writing- intensive course. As such:

- All students will be required to write **two short book/film review papers (3-4 pages double spaced)**. These are to be short, concise opinion pieces that pinpoint the key themes of the source and critique the arguments presented. The goal of these papers is to show how you, as an informed reader and critic, are able to engage the ideas, issues, personalities, and developments of religion, politics, and culture on a critical level. Students will be **required to hand these review papers in before class on their assigned day and to help lead class discussion that day. Students assigned to lead discussion on the same day will be expected to collaborate with each other; meeting before class to plan a course of action will be highly encouraged.**
- All students will be required to write a **research paper 20-25 pages in length**. Through a process of consultation with me and with classmates, students will design and carry out primary and secondary research on a major topic of their choosing. Throughout the semester class time will be set aside for research, writing, and work shopping. The latter will require you to come to class ready to share parts of your writing with classmates and to discuss possibilities for improvement.

OTHER EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS:

Late Policy:

There is no make-up exam except for those who have documented proof of medical issues, special needs, or family tragedy. Essays and review papers turned in late will be penalized one full letter grade per overdue class-day.

Keeping in Touch:

Open communication between the members of the class, including me, is of vital importance in making this experience work. If at any point in the semester you think that this course could be improved, please don't hesitate to talk to me. We can set up an appointment if my office hours are not good for you.

A Note About Plagiarism:

Any violation of the following principles in students' completed work constitutes plagiarism, which is normally considered a major offense. The penalty is, thus, failure in the course.

1. All written work submitted for credit is accepted as the student's own work; it may not, therefore, have been composed wholly or partially by another person.
2. The wording of written work is taken as the writer's own. Thus one may not submit work that has been copied, wholly or partially, from a book, article, essay, newspaper, another students' paper or notebook, or any other written or printed or media source. Another writer's phrases, sentences, or paragraphs may be included only if presented as quotations and the source acknowledged.
3. The ideas expressed in a paper or report are accepted as originating with the writer. Written work that paraphrases any written or printed media material without acknowledgement may not be submitted for credit. Ideas from books and essays may be incorporated in the writer's work as starting points, governing issues, illustrations, and the like, but in each case the source must be cited.
4. Students may correct and revise their writing with the aid of reference books. They may also discuss their writing with peer writing groups or with peer tutors. However, students may not submit writing that has been revised substantially by another.
5. No written work may be submitted for credit that has been used to fulfill the requirements of another course, in whatever department, unless permission to coordinate work has been granted by both teachers.

Course Schedule/Calendar:

*What follows is a rough estimate of our schedule for the next several weeks. Please keep in mind that some alterations might be made to the schedule as the semester unfolds. Handouts and additional readings might be requested/provided in addition to the assigned readings listed below.
**Unless noted otherwise, all book reviews are due on Thursday of the relevant week.

Week 1: Class Introductions

Assigned Reading:

- American Quarterly
 - R. Marie Griffith and Melani McAlister, “Introduction: Is the Public Square Still Naked?”
- Meg Jacobs and Julian E. Zelizer, “The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History” (handout)

Tuesday Religion, Politics, and Society in 1900 and 2000

Thursday What is Politics? What is Religion? Discussion of Introductory Readings

Week 2: Legacies

Assigned Reading:

- Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity*
- Course Packet Readings on Populism

Tuesday Populists and Prophets

Thursday Discussion of Flake

Week 3: Crisis

Assigned Reading:

- Course Packet Readings on World War I Crisis of Faith

Tuesday Progressivism, the Social Gospel, and World War I

Thursday Discussion of Readings

Week 4: Clash

Assigned Reading:

- Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero*
- Course Packet Readings on Scopes Trial

Tuesday Faith and the Fragmentation of American Political Culture

Thursday Discussion of Kazin

Week 5: Reform

Assigned Reading:

- Kevin Schultz, “The FEPC and the Legacy of the Labor-Based Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s” (*Labor History*, February 2008)
- Excerpts from Dorothy Day
- Course Packet Readings on Religion, Labor, and New Deal Reform

Tuesday Religion, Social Democracy, and the New Deal Coalition

Thursday Discussion of Readings

Week 6: Dissent

Assigned Reading:

- Matthew Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson*
- Course Packet Readings on Grassroots Religion in 1930s

Tuesday Religious Voices of Protest
Thursday Discussion of Readings

Week 7: Internationalism

Assigned Reading:

- American Quarterly
 - Michael G. Thompson, “An Exception to Exceptionalism: A Reflection on Reinhold Niebuhr’s ‘Prophetic’ Christianity and the Problem of Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy”
- Mark Edwards, “‘God Has Chosen Us’: Christian Realism, Responsibility and the Uses of American Power” (*Diplomatic History*)
- Excerpts from Edward Blum, *American Prophet*
- Course Packet Readings on Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian Realism, and Race

Assignment:

- Research Paper Topic Due Thursday

Tuesday Race, Religion, and American Exceptionalism in the 1940s
Thursday Discussion of Readings

Week 8: Communism

Assigned Reading:

- Mary Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace*
- Excerpts from Marion Miller’s, *I Was a Spy*

Tuesday Communism, Judeo-Christianity, and the Cold War
Thursday Discussion of Readings

Week 9: Neighborhood

Assigned Reading:

- Excerpts from John McGreevy, Etan Diamond, and Gerald Gamm
- Course Packet Readings on Suburban Religion and Politics

Tuesday The Politics of Urban and Suburban Faith
Thursday Discussion of Readings

Week 10: Rights

Assigned Reading:

- David Chappell, *Stone of Hope*
- Excerpts from Paul Harvey, *Freedom’s Coming*

Tuesday Religion, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement
Thursday Discussion of Readings

Week 11: Youth

Assigned Reading:

- Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity*
- Course Packet Readings on Conservative College Politics

Assignment:

- Outline and Thesis Statement Due Thursday

Tuesday The Politics of Youth in the 1960s

Thursday Discussion of Readings and Work-Shopping Outlines/Thesis Statements

Week 12: Identity

Assigned Reading:

- American Quarterly
 - Prema Kurien, “Who Speaks for Indian Americans? Religion, Ethnicity, and Political Formation”
 - Laura Levitt, “Impossible Assimilations, American Liberalism, and Jewish Difference: Revisiting Jewish Secularism”
 - Luis Leon, “Cesar Chavez in American Religious Politics: Remapping the New Spiritual Line”

Tuesday Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity Politics

Thursday Discussion of Readings

Week 13: Sunbelt

Assigned Reading:

- Steven Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*
- Course Packet Readings on Sunbelt Evangelicalism

Tuesday Sunbelt Rising

Thursday Discussion of Readings

Week 14: Family

Assigned Reading:

- American Quarterly
 - Neil J. Young, “‘The ERA is a Moral Issue’: The Mormon Church, LDS Women, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment”
- Donald Critchlow, “Conservatism Reconsidered: Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism” (from David Farber and Jeff Roche, eds., *The Conservative Sixties*)
- Course Packet Readings on Religion and Family Politics in the 1970s

Assignment:

- Rough Draft Due Tuesday
- Presentation of Research Findings Thursday

Tuesday Discussion of Readings

Thursday Work-Shopping and Presenting Rough Drafts

Week 15: Revolution

Assigned Reading:

- Jerry Falwell, *Strength for the Journey*
- Course Packet Readings on Christian Right

Assignment:

- Late Term Exam

Tuesday Discussion of Readings and “With God on Our Side”
Thursday Late Term Exam

Week 16: Globalization

Assigned Reading:

- American Quarterly
 - Evelyn Alsutany, “Selling American Diversity and Muslim American Identity through Nonprofit Advertising Post-9/11”
 - Edward E. Curtis IV, “Islamism and Its African American Muslim Critics: Black Muslims in the Era of the Arab Cold War”
 - Jodi Eichler-Levine and Rosemary Hicks, ““As Americans Against Genocide’: The Crisis in Darfur and Interreligious Political Activism”
 - Barbara Dianne Savage, “Benjamin Mays, Global Ecumenism, and Local Religious Segregation”

Tuesday Discussion of Readings
Thursday Class Wrap-up

Essays Due First Day of Exam Week