

RS50: Exploring American Religious History

2 days a week, 75 minute class sessions

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INSTITUTIONAL SETTING AND CURRICULAR CONTEXT:

Stanford University is a private institution with 7,000 undergraduates and 10,000 graduate students. Stanford's location in the heart of the Silicon Valley makes it appealing to students who are interested in science and technology. Roughly 90% of all Stanford undergraduates take at least one computer science class. By contrast, Religious Studies classes are small (as are most Humanities classes in general). Of Bachelor's degrees conferred between 2013 and 2014, those in "Philosophy, religion, theology" formed the smallest proportion of the student body (1.22 percent).

"Exploring American Religious History" is a new class that will fit into the Department's "Exploring" series. Courses that fall under this heading are supposed to offer students broad, entry-level introductions to a field. The department hopes that classes that fall under this series will enroll healthy numbers of students.

This course will also be a regular offering in the "helix" of "American Religions in a Global Context" at Stanford. A "helix" is an interdisciplinary constellation of courses around a theme; it may lead to a certification on a student's transcript but beyond that, it's still a developing proposal of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. Mainly, the members of the helix hope to see this class serve as a gateway to other, more advanced and more topically focused offerings within the helix.

I anticipate that this course will also be cross-listed with History, American Studies, and the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY:

Our classes tend to be a hybrid of lecture/seminar depending on how many students enroll. We often have to be flexible until the last minute on how the class will actually be structured.

Against every fiber of historical training that I have received, I have decided to structure the course thematically instead of chronologically. My reasoning for this is that on the quarter system, I worry that a chronological romp through American religious history could only skim the surface and would get bogged down in connecting the dots on an inevitably incomprehensive timeline. Mercenarily, I am also hoping to attract students who are primarily interested in contemporary issues: they won't have to wait until the end of the quarter to get to the 20th/21st C, but will instead have a taste of how the past informs the present in each unit.

Assuming there will be a small enough number of students that I can run the course as a partial seminar, the structure of each session will typically be as follows: 1) students will reflect on the readings or another assigned question in a 5-minute in-class writing journal; 2) we will discuss students' reflections; 3) I will provide a mini-lecture on the topic and contextualize the readings; 4) we will discuss/do a

learning activity on the readings; 5) we will end with a student's podcast on a historical figure relevant to the day's topic.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This class sheds light on religion's deep roots in American history in order to help students understand its continued significance today. The course is divided into five thematic units, each offering a different way of understanding religion in America: 1) through the lens of the supernatural, 2) in its entanglements with race, 3) as women's history, 4) as entwined with American politics, and 5) in contemporary culture. Each unit begins with a session titled "What's at stake?", which focuses on secondary source debates over the topic more broadly. Other sessions in the unit typically pair a brief secondary source reading on the day's specific topic with primary sources.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will develop an understanding of key themes in American religious history and the ways in which scholars have discussed and debated them.
- Students will learn how to critically read primary sources, how to assess them against what scholars have said about a subject, and how to imaginatively engage them as artifacts of our shared past.
- Students will develop an appreciation for how competing claims to religious authenticity create different narratives of the American religious past that intersect with and challenge each other, making a single metanarrative difficult. They will learn to critically appraise attempts at metanarrative, such as in political election cycles and in PBS's *God in America*.

REQUIRED READINGS:

All readings will be available in Coursework Materials or online as noted.

Assignments

- 10% In-class writing assignments and bring-to-class assignments
- 15% Participation (includes attendance)
- 20% Exam #1 (to be held in class during our 10th session)
- 20% Exam #2 (to be held during the final exam slot)
- 35% "Biographies in American Religious History" podcast

The "Biographies in American Religious History" podcast is your opportunity to delve into a historical character of your choosing and to produce a 7-8 minute podcast about her/him, along with a script, which you will turn in on the day your podcast is due.

Your podcast can be as creative or as straightforward as you would like. You can choose to create an imaginative script narrated from the point of view of the person you have selected, that dramatizes the historical context and significance of their life. You might choose to adopt the persona of a biographer being interviewed on a radio show about the historical figure you've been researching. You may enlist friends to play different characters/voices in your podcast, but that is not a requirement. No matter what format you choose, your podcast should include the following:

- Biographical background (consult at least one secondary source outside of class readings)

- Historical context (consult at least one secondary source outside of class readings)
- Contributions (consult at least two primary sources outside of class readings)
- Significance (how does your character address the “what’s at stake” questions in the relevant unit?)

We will play and listen to each other’s podcasts over the course of the quarter. Podcasts will be due at different times in the quarter depending on when we discuss the topic/time period into which your chosen figure best fits. Students are responsible for listening closely to each other’s podcasts and taking notes; the historical figures presented will show up on your exams.

You may choose from this list of historical figures or obtain my approval on a figure of your choosing:

- Popé
- John Winthrop
- Anne Hutchinson
- Roger Williams
- William Penn
- Mary Rowlandson
- Neolin
- George Whitefield
- Jemima Wilkinson
- Rebecca Protten
- John Woolman
- Handsome Lake
- Samson Occom
- William Apess
- Hannah Adams
- Ann Lee
- Tenskwatawa
- Jarena Lee
- Frederick Douglass
- Robert Mathews (Matthias the Prophet)
- William Miller
- Ellen Harmon White
- Angelina Grimké
- Charles Finney
- Brigham Young
- Catharine Beecher
- Daniel Alexander Payne
- John Humphrey Noyes
- Isaac Mayer Wise
- Isaac Leeser
- Billy Sunday
- Dwight Moody
- Swami Vivekananda
- Jane Addams
- Ida B. Wells

- Frances Willard
- Russell Herman Conwell
- Josiah Strong
- Walter Rauschenbusch
- Mary Baker Eddy
- Charles Fox Parham
- Wovoka
- Black Elk
- W. E. B. Du Bois
- D. T. Suzuki
- Jack Kornfield
- Dorothy Day
- Noble Drew Ali
- Father Divine
- Daddy Grace
- Wallace Fard
- Elijah Muhammad
- Norman Vincent Peale
- Phyllis Schlafly
- Mary Daly
- Abraham Heschel
- Cesar Chavez
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Malcolm X
- Francis Schaeffer
- Jerry Falwell
- Jim Wallis
- Cornel West
- L Ron Hubbard
- Creflo Dollar
- Joel Osteen
- Brian McLaren
- Oprah

For examples of brief podcasts on historical subjects, listen to *The Memory Palace*, available here:

<http://thememorypalace.us/>

This episode, “Natural Curiosity,” is a model of a 7-minute podcast with minimal “special” effects (some background music, that’s all!): <http://thememorypalace.us/2011/01/natural-curiosity/>

For instructions on using Audacity, see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hrBbczS9IO>

For instructions on using GarageBand, see: <http://mac.appstorm.net/how-to/music/creating-a-podcast-using-garageband/>

Overall grades will be determined on a percentage scale (93-100% is an A, 90-92% is an A-, 87-89% is a B+, 83-86% is a B, 80-82% is a B-, etc.).

Absences:

You may take 1 absence without penalty; please notify the professor by no later than **9AM** the morning of class. If you need to take more than 1 absence but have a compelling reason, talk to me and we can work something out. Unexcused absences will result in 2% deductions to your participation grade per absence.

Late policy:

If you don't think you can make a deadline, come talk to me as soon as possible. Unexcused late work will be deducted by one percentage point per hour late.

Contact Information and Office Hours:

TBA

Accommodations:

Students who require academic accommodation or the use of auxiliary aids or services should initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education's Disability Resource Center (DRC), which will recommend accommodations. Contact the DRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed for appropriate accommodations (650-723-1066). You may also consult with the instructor.

The Honor Code:

Students will be expected to know and abide by the Stanford Honor Code, which is available at: <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/guiding/honorcode.htm>. In brief, conduct prohibited by the Honor Code includes all forms of academic dishonesty, including copying from another's work, unpermitted collaboration, and representing as one's own work the work of another. If you have any questions, please feel welcome to see me.

SCHEDULE

Session 1: What is "American," "religious," and "historical" about American religious history?

In-Class Writing Assignment:

- Answer the following questions in your notebook: What is "America"? And how do you define "religion"?

Required Readings:

- RaAC forum on "What is 'American' about American religion?" available <http://raac.iupui.edu/forum/what-american-american-religion-february-2014/>
- Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious"
- Pew Forum, "Religious Landscape Study," available <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>
- "The Religious States of America, in 22 Maps," *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2015/02/26/the-religious-states-of-america-in-22-maps/>

Unit 1: Religion as... the Supernatural?

The supernatural is often the first thing that comes to mind when people think about religion. In this unit, we will look at the story of religion in America through the lens of the supernatural, encountering visionaries, mystics, scientists, and scholars. We will also examine the question of deconversion/secularization through the lens of the supernatural.

Session 2: What's at Stake?

Required Reading:

- Robert Orsi, Introduction and Chapter 6, "Snakes Alive," in *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*

Session 3: The Mental Worlds of Early America

Required Reading:

- "A Case of Diabolical Possession," in John Demos, ed. *Remarkable Providences: Readings on Early American History*

In-Class Writing Assignment:

- Describe your "mental world." What about your environment do you notice on a daily basis? Which senses do you use in noticing these things? What scares you about the world we live in? What comforts you? Why?

Session 4: Hearing Things: The American Enlightenment and the Senses

Required Readings:

- Leigh Schmidt, Chapter 2, "Sound Christians," and Chapter 3, "Oracles of Reason," in *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment*

In-Class Primary Source Analysis:

- Brief excerpts from Benjamin Abbott's Autobiography (visions/dreams) and Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*

Session 5: The Supernatural in Contemporary America

Bring to Class Assignment:

- Please bring in an example of the supernatural in contemporary America.

Required Readings:

- W. Scott Poole, Chapter 6, "Haunted Houses," and Chapter 7, "Undead Americans," in *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting*

Unit 2: Religion as... Race?

One of the stories about religion in America is that religious categories—Christian, heathen, saved, damned—informed, and then got replaced by, racial categories by the late-nineteenth century. Another story holds that religious communities both fostered racial solidarity and ameliorated racism. We'll look at narratives like these, relating religion to race, in this unit.

Session 6: What's at Stake?

Required Reading:

- Introduction in Henry Goldschmidt and Elizabeth McAlister, *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas*

Session 7: "Heathens" and "Christians"

Required Readings:

- Excerpts from Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, William Apess, *The Experience of Five Christian Indians*, and Frederick Douglass, *Narrative*

In-class writing assignment:

- Based on the readings, why do you think “heathen” and “Christian” in the title of this session are in quotes?

Session 8: The World’s Parliament of Religions

Required Readings:

- Mabel Potter Daggett, “The Heathen Invasion of America”
- Chapter 7, “The World’s Parliament of Religions,” in Thomas Tweed and Stephen Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History*

In-class writing assignment:

- Why do you think many scholars see the World’s Parliament of Religions as a major turning point in the history of American religion?

Session 9: Liberation Theologies

Required Reading:

- Selections from Edwin Redkey, ed., *Respect Black: The Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner*, James Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, and Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*

Session 10: IN-CLASS MIDTERM

Unit 3: US Religious History as Women’s History?

One of the questions that scholars of religion in America have been asking for some time is whether American religious history is actually women’s history, and vice versa. In this unit, we will look at scholarly works and primary sources that allow us to better assess this question.

Session 11: What’s at Stake?

Required Readings:

- Ann Braude, “American Religious History Is Women’s History”
- Harry Stout and Catherine Brekus, “Declension, Gender, and the New Religious History”

Session 12: Domesticity and its Discontents

Required Readings:

- Excerpts from Catharine Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*
- Selections from John Humphrey Noyes, “Essay on Scientific Propagation,” <http://library.syr.edu/digital/collections/e/EssayOnScientificPropagation/>

In-class writing assignment:

- Browse and comment on “The Young Wife’s Guide”’s similarities to and differences from 19th century domesticity: <http://youngwifeguide.com/managing-your-home-for-gods-glory/>

Session 13: Food, Family, and Faith

- R. Marie Griffith, Chapter 5, “‘Don’t Eat That’: Denial, Indulgence, and Exclusion in Christian Diet Culture,” in *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity*
- Rachel B. Gross, “‘Draydel Salad’: The Serious Business of Jewish Food and Fun in Postwar America,” in Benjamin Zeller et al, ed., *Religion, Food, and Eating in North America*

In-class primary source analysis:

- Excerpts from Rhonda Byrnes, *The Secret*

Unit 4: American Religious Freedom?

Religious freedom is a founding American principle... or is it? In this unit, we look at whether and how American religious freedom might be seen as a myth, and at contests over American religious freedom, from the nation's founding to the present day.

Session 14: What's at Stake?

Required Readings:

- Excerpts from David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom*
- Thomas Jefferson, "A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom"
- James Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments"

Session 15: The "Mormon Problem"

Required Readings:

- Excerpts from Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America*

Bring-to-class assignment:

- Search America's Historical Newspapers online (you can access this from library.stanford.edu) for an article related to the reading, and be prepared to discuss in class.

Session 16: Claiming "Religion"

Required Readings:

- Tisa Wenger, "Indian Dances and the Politics of American Religious Freedom, 1870-1930," in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (JStor it)

Session 17: Islamophobia

Required Readings:

- Rosemary R. Hicks, "Between lived and the law: power, empire, and expansion in studies of North American religions," <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0048721X.2012.681877#preview>

Bring-to-class assignment:

- Please bring in an example of Islamophobia (a media clip, a political cartoon, an advertisement, a news article, etc.) and be prepared to analyze what it tells us about the myth of American religious freedom in the contemporary United States.

Unit 5: Where to from here?

In this brief concluding unit, we look at contemporary declension narratives—about religion being coopted by greed/mass media, and about religion declining among millennials—and talk about where American religious history might be heading.

Session 18: Megachurches and Money

Required Readings:

- Russell Conwell, "Acres of Diamonds," <http://www.temple.edu/about/history/acres-diamonds>
- Creflo Dollar, "The Root to Prosperity," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UlkfCBi6p_M
- John Oliver, "Televangelists," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7y1xJAVZxXg>

Session 19: The Rise of the “Nones” and the End of Religion? ... not so fast

Required Readings:

- Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,”
<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

In-class writing assignment:

- Does the Pew article accurately reflect your sense of your peers’ religious lives/landscapes?

Session 20: Wrap-Up

In-class writing assignment:

- Analysis of opening sequence of PBS’s *God in America*

FINAL EXAM DATE TBA