

History 366 – Religious History of the United States since 1865  
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## **RELIGION IN UNITED STATES HISTORY SINCE 1865**

### **INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT**

Texas A&M is a large state university. It draws a large range of students, but they are overwhelmingly from Texas. The student culture is strongly influenced by a very public, conservative, evangelical Christianity, but students tend to be respectful and willing to engage questions when asked. The history department has customarily taught American Religious History as a two-sequence course, divided roughly at the Civil War. The first half has been taught regularly in recent years, the second half has been inactive for quite some time. Upper level courses such as this are generally capped at 45, and because both religion and American history are subjects that our students find very compelling, I can realistically expect the class to fill to that level. Based on experiences in other courses, I can expect most of my students to be liberal arts majors, and about half to be history majors. A handful will have taken other courses in religion in other fields.

### **ORGANIZATION OF COURSE MATERIAL**

The goal of this course is to have students critically engage the role that religion has played in American history, by which I mean I want them to learn to interrogate the past with respect to three different issues: 1) the often-complicated relationship between a Protestant “center” or dominant culture and the reality of an ever-changing religious diversity in American society (esp. units on religion and public life and religion and immigration); 2) the evolving place of religion in American culture and public life (esp. units on religion and public life, and religion, capitalism, and culture; 3) the role of religion as the zone where beliefs and values that are “truer than truth” are formed and reformed (esp. units on religion, science and reason, and religion and gender).

In the course’s introductory week, the students will read an article complicating the definition of religion in modern America, and they will also examine the website of the “Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster,” a religion created for the purpose of contesting Kansas’s ruling on teaching “intelligent design.” The purpose of this first week is twofold. I want students to understand that this course will repeatedly ask the question of what “religion” was in a specific historical context, and that we will also be looking at the peculiarly American religious environment -- one dominated (in very different ways) by both Christian hegemony and legal equality. Although both of these sources are quite light-hearted, the goal is serious. Because I am teaching at a school with a self-consciously Christian student culture, I want students to understand from the beginning that this class will not be a triumphant narrative of the United States as a Christian nation, even though we will talk a great deal about why many Americans are invested in that particular form of patriotism.

For the rest of the semester, I have organized the course thematically. Each unit will begin with a lecture, and then proceed as a series of discussions about ongoing debates within American society about religion. This organization differs from how I teach the “first half,” where I move through American religious history chronologically, and I rely heavily on lecture. I felt, however, that the material in the “second

half” would not be well served by such an approach, as it would inappropriately reinforce the strength of the dominant Protestant tradition. Nor was I comfortable with a “traditions” approach, which makes historical context more difficult to address. Nonetheless, I felt the students would need a quick refresher course on the major events of the last century and a half. To meet this need, the course’s first unit is an extended (three rather than two) week engagement with the subject of religion in American public life. In that chronological sequence, we will touch on the Civil War, Progressive Era, Cold War, and Civil Rights.

In the fifth week of the semester, we will then begin a series of five two-week units, dedicated to the subjects of Immigration and American Religion; Religion, Reason, and Science; Gender and Religion; Religion, Culture, and Capitalism; and, finally, Religion in Contemporary American Life. Through each of these units, students will be asked to do readings from a variety of time periods from the late 19th century to the present. Most of the units also reflect a broad narrative of the United State’s transformation from a nation that assumed a powerfully dominant public Christian culture to a nation where religion has become something individualized and situated in a broadly secular culture. This narrative is advanced most directly through the course’s monographs. Flake tells the story of enlarging access to the nation’s public space; Larson details an enduring conflict within national religious culture, and Winner’s memoir will resonate with contemporary culture’s preoccupation with individual biography.

#### **ORGANIZATION OF ASSIGNMENTS**

I have chosen to emphasize discussion and to limit the role of lecture in this course because I want students to engage the ideas offered in the readings rather than to master a single historical narrative. To facilitate this, I am employing a structure that I’ve used successfully in other courses. During the first week, students will select a day when they will be responsible for leading discussion. On that day, they will also turn in a short paper about the course readings. This method, along with a series of unannounced quizzes, ensures that at least some significant portion (in my experience, about 2/3rds) of the students have more than passing familiarity with the readings. In addition, the students’ desire not to see each other embarrassed often makes a wide range of students willing to contribute to discussion.

The course’s primary tool for evaluation is a series of papers. There are five topics on the syllabus, spaced throughout the semester one week after the conclusion of each major unit. Each student will select three to write on, and they have the option to rewrite. These short papers (750 wds) offer students the opportunity to engage specific material on a deeper and more sustained level. All of the questions require the student to select a narrow subject as a route into a broad area. As everyone has experienced in class, of course, good students will do this easily, weaker or less motivated students will likely summarize too much. This structure does facilitate the course on a number of levels, however. Students get greater writing experience (something the University is pushing at the moment); through rewrites they have the opportunity to rethink a question; and the general de-emphasis on mastering a quantity of material (i.e., no tests) gets the students to relax and enjoy the discussions more.

#### **SELECTION OF SUBJECTS (OR, WHAT’S LEFT OUT)**

The most difficult consequence of organizing a class is what is left out. The list of things not covered here is very long, but most notable is the fact that I have not included the central theme of race as one of my key subjects. Instead, I have tried to integrate investigation in to that subject into each of the themes. It is my hope that attention to perceptions of racial difference throughout will also allows discussion

of race in ways that go beyond the black-white dichotomy in American history to include attitudes towards Native Americans and non-European immigrants. A second theme I have woven throughout is the experience of American Jews. This will facilitate comparisons between the Jewish experience and the experience of other Americans. In short, rather than having units on Blacks and Jews, I tried to make these two classic “others” into parts of the central story.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The United States has been called a nation with the soul of a church. It has also been called wicked, soulless and corrupt. A Christian nation and a melting pot where all faiths are welcome. Religion plays, and has always played, a central role in the nation’s history, but that has never been a simple history. This course will explore American religion as an ongoing series of conversations: over the role of religion in our politics, in our understanding of each other, in the way we engage science and knowledge, in the way we understand gender and family, and in our mass media and culture.

### **READINGS**

There are four required texts for this course. All are available in the university bookstore. Other readings, noted on the syllabus below, will be available on electronic reserve.

- David G. Hackett, *Religion and American Culture: A Reader*, 2nd Edition
- Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle*
- Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion*
- Lauren F. Winner, *Girl Meets God: A Memoir*

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

- **Leading discussion and discussion paper (15%):** During the first week of the semester, students will select a day during which they will be a discussion leader. Normally, there will be two or even three leaders on each day. Although you do not need to work as a group, you may if you wish. As a discussion leader, you will be responsible for answering questions on the reading and guiding our shared discussion.

On the day you lead discussion, you will also turn in (in person and online) a short (750 word) paper summarizing and analyzing the reading.

- **Class Participation (15%):** Because discussion is a central element of the course, attendance and participation in discussions accounts for 15% of your grade. A word to the wise: students who participate actively in discussion almost invariably are better prepared to write strong papers.
- **Short Papers (30%):** There are five questions, related to the readings, included on the syllabus. Each student will complete three of these assignments by writing a short (750 words) essay. Papers are due at the start of class on the date listed. These papers will be turned in electronically to “turnitin.com” and in-class in hard copy form. This is discussed in greater detail below.

When writing the short papers, students may use course materials only: lectures, primary sources discussed in class, and other readings assigned for the course. All quotations and information must be cited. Outside research may only be included with prior approval of the professor. **Internet research (including wikipedia) is not permitted.**

- **Revising Papers:** Students may revise papers that receive a B or below. Revised papers must be turned in within two weeks of the date they were handed back by the professor. The revised paper must incorporate substantive changes to such matters as structure, argument, and clarity of writing.
- **Unannounced Reading Quizzes (15%):** There will be 10 short, unannounced reading quizzes during the semester. They will be averaged, and each student may drop one score.
- **Final Exam (25%):** A take home final exam, similar to the papers written during the semester, will be due during exam week.

### **Grading Summary**

15% Leading discussion and discussion paper

15% Class participation

30% (10% each) three 750 word papers selected from five topics on syllabus

15% Unannounced reading quizzes

25% Final Exam

### **TURNITIN.COM**

As your professor in this course, I chose to use *Turnitin.com*, an Internet-based service, which serves as a tool to help detect plagiarism. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, because it destroys the trust among colleagues; and without trust research cannot be safely communicated, and consequently there would be no advancement of science. Therefore, it is my hope that you all agree that we all are going to benefit from the use of this service.

Turnitin.com reduces plagiarism by comparing course papers to on-line resources and against turnitin.com's database which includes books, journals, and paper-selling services. For more information on this service please visit: <http://itsinfo.tamu.edu/turnitin/>.

To use Turnitin, go to <http://www.turnitin.com> and follow the instructions about creating a user profile and submitting your work. To protect your intellectual property rights no one will have access to your work except your professor.

### **REACHING ME**

My office hours are Tuesday and Thursday, 1:00 – 2:00, and by appointment. My office is 303-A in the Glasscock (History) Building. Email is the most efficient way to reach me ([kcengel@tamu.edu](mailto:kcengel@tamu.edu)). My office

number is 845-7672. If you need to let me know something (such as a class you're going to miss), please email me (in advance of the absence) so that I have it in writing.

If you are concerned about your performance in this course, either in your understanding of the material or how you are performing on the assignments, please see me before week 9 of the semester. After that point, there is little I can do to help you improve your study skills and therefore your grade. Of course, if you are worried about a particular assignment or subject, or have a crisis related to the class, please feel free to come to my office.

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Students are required to attend all course meetings, unless prevented from doing so by a reason eligible for a "university approved" excuse. Examples include religious holidays and severe illness in the family. Students are **STRONGLY** encouraged to contact the instructor as soon as an absence is anticipated.

*Unexcused absences will lower your course participation grade.*

### **LATE WORK POLICY**

Assignments are due by the beginning of class on the due date. No late papers will be accepted under any circumstances without prior approval of the instructor. Exceptions will only be made in the case of "university approved" excuses.

### **AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)**

Students with Disabilities: The "Americans with Disabilities Act" is a federal anti-discrimination law that provides civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this law requires that students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If a student believes that they have a disability requiring accommodation, they should contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities, in Cain Hall, (campus phone 845-1637).

It is the responsibility of the student to discuss this matter with the professor.

### **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY/PLAGIARISM**

The Texas A&M University Student Handbook (available online by consulting <http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor/Handbook.pdf>) contains a clear statement regarding "Academic Dishonesty & Plagiarism." Plagiarism is a form of cheating." According to the aggie honor Web site, "plagiarism" can be understood as "the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results or words without giving appropriate credit" (aggiehonor/Handbook). Plagiarism may involve uncited or uncredited use of papers or materials taken in whole or in part from other persons or references, such as from Internet Web sites, books, magazines, journals, or newspapers, or from other students' papers or assignments. If you are unsure of the meaning of this description, confer with the professor if you have any questions. Committing plagiarism will result in receiving an 'F' on the assignment, possibly an 'F' in the course, and may lead to expulsion from the University.

**COURSE SCHEDULE - READINGS WILL BE DISCUSSED ON THE DATE LISTED**

January 19	Course Introduction
January 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hackett - Chidester</li><li>• Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster Website (<a href="http://www.venganza.org/">http://www.venganza.org/</a>)</li><li>• Reagan's speech before 1984 prayer breakfast.</li></ul>
January 26	Unit 1 : Religion in American Public Life
January 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hackett - Wilson</li><li>• Horace Bushnell, "Our Obligations to the Dead"</li><li>• Ida B. Wells, from <i>A Red Record</i></li></ul>
February 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flake, <i>The Politics of American Religious Identity</i>, 1-81</li></ul>
February 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flake, <i>The Politics of American Religion Identity</i>, 82-177</li><li>• Tisa Wenger, "We are Guaranteed Freedom': Pueblo Indians and the Category of Religion in the 1920s."</li></ul>
February 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Boyer, <i>When Times Shall Be No More</i>, Chapter 6</li><li>• Stephen J. Whitfield, <i>The Culture of the Cold War</i>, Chapter 4.</li></ul>
February 11:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Harvey, <i>Freedom's Coming</i>, 169-217</li><li>• Hackett - Cone</li></ul>
February 16	Unit 2: Immigration and American Religion
February 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Orsi, <i>The Madonna of 115th Street</i>, 1-49</li><li>• Hackett - Sarna</li></ul>
<b>Paper 1</b>	<b>Describe and define the role of "religion" in one moment of American public life.</b>
February 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Daggett, "The Heathen Invasion of America"</li><li>• Hackett - Waghorne</li></ul>
February 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hackett - Moore</li><li>• McGreevy, <i>Parish Boundaries</i>, Chapter 4</li></ul>
March 2	Unit 3: Religion, Reason, and Science
March 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Marsden, "The Rise of American Fundamentalism"</li><li>• James Freeman Clarke, "The Ten Religions and Christianity"</li><li>• Swami Vivekananda, "Hinduism as a Religion"</li><li>• William James, from "The Varieties of Religious Experience"</li></ul>
<b>Paper 2</b>	<b>Analyze in detail an example of how new environments shaped the religious experiences of Americans. <i>You must draw on more than one</i></b>

*reading.*

- March 9 • Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 3-146.
- March 11 • Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 147-278.
- March 23 Unit 4: Gender and Religion
- March 25 • Hackett - Braude  
• Hackett - Hackett
- Paper 3 Was William Jennings Bryan representative of American religious thought? How so or how not?**
- March 30 • Hackett - Griffith  
• Hackett - Orsi
- April 1 • Taves, "Sexuality in American Religious History"
- April 6 Unit 5: Religion, Culture, and Capitalism
- April 8 • Hackett - Schmidt  
• McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, 222-269
- Paper 4 Is the concept of "gender" useful for understanding the role of religion in American history? Why or why not?**
- April 13 • Hackett - Wacker  
• Hackett - Jocks
- April 15 • Trysh Travis, "It Will Change the World If Everybody Reads this Book': New Thought Religion in Oprah's Book Club"  
• Kathryn Lofton, "Practicing Oprah; or, the Prescriptive Compulsion of a Spiritual Capitalism"
- April 20 Unit 6: Religion in Contemporary American Life  
• Winner, *Girl Meets God*, 1-155
- April 22 • Winner, *Girl Meets God*, 155-296  
• Michael Warner, "Tongues Untied: Memoirs of a Pentecostal Boyhood"
- Paper 5 Compare Oprah's and William Jennings Bryan's use of religion and media.**
- April 27 • Hackett - Bellah  
• Hackett - Wuthnow
- April 29 • Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address  
• Speeches from Obama's inauguration

**The topic for the final paper (1000 wds) will be announced during the final week of the semester. It will be due on the day of the final exam, as determined by the registrar.**