

Religious Narratives in American Identity

Overview/Objectives

This is an upper-division seminar course, cross-listed in the honors college of Valparaiso University and the English Department. The enrollment cap is 18, and currently there are 10 students in the class. The class is intended for juniors and seniors or sophomore majors/honors students. In compliance with the basic expectations of a 300-level course in the honors college, it utilizes a Socratic/discussion format, and papers are the primary assignments. This is also a team-taught, interdisciplinary course, taught by Joe Creech of the Honors College who is trained in history, and Haein Park of the English Department, a specialist in American literature. Both Creech and Park have an abiding interest in American religious history. As stated in the aims of the course, this class examines the way religion has shaped conceptions of American national identity by analyzing how certain literary texts have connected religious ideas and practices to larger cultural, social, and political historical phenomena. The course has intended to examine both the context of each literary text--how it connects to important "webs of meaning" within a given historical situation--as well as how that text has then shaped those "webs of meaning" themselves as it has become part of some Americans' sense of national and religious identity.

CC 325/ENG 365: Religious Narratives in American Identity
Syllabus, Spring 2006
T, Th 11:50-1:05; MUH 110

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I. Overview and Aims of the Course:

In this course we will examine American literary works spanning from the colonial to the modern period that in one way or another address religion and national identity as those entities have changed over time. This course is explicitly cross-disciplinary, combining insights from history and the study of literature to shed light on the way religion has shaped how Americans understand themselves and their nation. Starting with the colonial and moving through to the modern period, this course will examine such themes as exceptionalism, innocence, election, social concern, and freedom as they were expressed in mainstream and non-mainstream religious contexts. In exploring these issues, we have three primary aims in mind.

1. We will gain insight into the way religion has shaped conceptions of American national identity. In accomplishing this goal, we will examine how certain literary texts have connected religious ideas and practices to larger cultural, social, and political historical phenomena. Most importantly, we will examine how these texts have enabled Americans to understand what their nation is and what it means for them to be Americans.
2. We will gain insights into the disciplines of history and literary studies by examining what sorts of questions each discipline raises, what sorts of insights they offer, and how by working in tandem, they offer unique ways to understand events, ideas, and especially the way people construct national identity through story telling.
3. We will practice the arts of history and literary analysis in class and through writing our own analyses of literary texts.

II. Texts for the Course:

Required reading available at Valparaiso University bookstore:

Mary Rowlandson, *Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Minister's Wooing*

Harold Frederic, *The Damnation of Theron Ware*

Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

Dorothy Day, *Long Loneliness*

James Baldwin, *Go Tell It On The Mountain*

Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*

Optional reading available at Valparaiso University bookstore:
Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins*

Additional Handouts:

Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System."

Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, excerpts

H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, Chapters 2 and 3

Conrad Cherry, "Introduction," *God's new Israel*

Declaration of Independence

Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural" and "Gettysburg Address"

John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity"

William Bradford, excerpts

Maushop Myth

William Byrd II, *Diary*, excerpts

John White, *The True Pictures and Fashions of the People in That Part of America now Called Virginia*

Arthur Barlowe, "First Voyage to Virginia"

Anne Bradstreet, Selected Poems

Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Introduction and Chapter 4

Lyman Beecher, *Plea for the West*

Catherine Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, excerpts

Chief Seattle, "Oration"

Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener"

Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"

Nat Turner, *Confession*

Josiah Strong, *Our Country*, excerpts

Internet Resources you might find valuable:

<http://www.libs.uga.edu/darchive/hargrett/maps/colamer.html> (colonial maps).

<http://tigger.uic.edu/~rjensen/pol-gl.htm> (miscellaneous resources)

<http://un2sg4.unige.ch/athena/html/authors.html> (primary sources)

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/mss/ammem.html> (primary sources)

<http://www.abacci.com/books/authors.asp> (primary sources)

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook1.html> (primary sources)

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook2.html> (primary sources)

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/browse/manypasts/> (primary sources)

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/index.html> (primary sources)

<http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/moagrp/> (primary sources)

<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/> (primary sources)

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/hypertext.html> (primary sources)

<http://www.history-journals.de/journals/hjg-start.html> (history periodicals)

To find the MLA or the Chicago style for citing material in your essays, go the bibliographical references on the writing center's web site at: <http://www.valpo.edu/writctr/bibliogr.html>

III. Course Requirements

Attendance, Lectures, Readings, Discussions

Attendance

Because this is a discussion-orientated course, and because there are no exams, your prompt and attentive attendance is mandatory. If you must miss a class session, please let us know why before or immediately after the missed class. You will be required to write a paragraph on the reading for the day in order to receive credit for the missed class.

Lectures:

Even though the class is geared towards reading and discussion, lectures will be a part of many class periods. The purpose of the lectures is to give you the basic historical overview of the period and to draw together major themes and problems from the readings.

Readings:

We will read approximately 200 pages per week, which is quite a bit, but the reading component is your main assignment for the class, as we have only two major papers. Be ready to discuss these texts in class; to do so, be sure to bring notes, questions, and observations to class.

Discussions:

About every class meeting we will discuss the readings due for that day (see the "Course Outline" below). For the discussions we will give you questions to guide your reading, and you will bring a brief, typed, paragraph to class that answers one of these questions on this discussion guide or raises a question of your own. These discussion times will comprise the main portion of your class participation grade, and, because we are doing so much reading and few formal papers, these paragraphs will count as a considerable component of your grade.

Papers, Presentations, and Grading

Papers:

In addition to the regular paragraphs due at each class, you will also write two longer interpretive papers on selected texts. The first paper, which will be due on **Friday, February 24**, will be a 5-6 page analysis of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Minister's Wooing*. The paper will ask to explain how the text engages certain religious themes in the culture in such a way as to narrate the meaning of American nationhood. The paper will require moderate outside reading (2 sources). The second paper, which will be 8-10 pages and will be accompanied by a presentation, will similarly analyze Frederic's *Damnation of Theron Ware*, Hemingway's, *The Sun also Rises*, Day's *The Long Loneliness*, Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, Robinson's, *Gilead*, or Percy's *Love in the Ruins* (an optional text). These papers will consult more historical and literary sources (5) and is due on **Monday, May 15**.

Papers will be reduced one letter grade for each class period they are late up until failure, *although failure to turn in either paper will result in a failure for the class.* To find the MLA and Chicago format style for citing material in your essays, go the bibliographical references on the writing center's web site at: <http://www.valpo.edu/writctr/bibliogr.html>.

Presentations:

You will also make one 15-minute presentation on your longer paper.

Grading:

In order to pass this class, you must complete the research paper and related assignments, make your presentation, turn in all three of the shorter papers, and attend at least 60% of the classes. Failure to meet any of these expectations will result in a failure for the entire course.

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated in accordance with the University honor code. The honor code (“**I have neither given or received nor have I tolerated others’ use of unauthorized aid**”) should be written and signed on anything that is turned in for a grade in this course. Please see the sections at the end of this syllabus entitled "Honor Code" and "Plagiarism" for further clarification on this matter.

Students with special needs will be allotted additional time. If anyone requires special arrangements, please contact us, and we will do our best to accommodate you in this and all other circumstances.

Breakdown of grading:

Class participation	20%
Short Paper	20%
Long Paper	35%
Presentation	5%
Weekly Paragraphs	20%

Paper/Presentation Schedule:

- Friday, February 24, Paper #1 Due
- May 4, May 9, Presentations
- Monday, May 15, paper #2 Due

IV. Course Outline

1. Introduction to the Course:

Thursday, January 12

2. Myth, Narrative, and the Construction of Historical Consciousness:

Tuesday, January 17: Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" (handout); Durkheim handout

Thursday, January 19: H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, Chapter 2 (handout);
Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address" (handout)

Tuesday, January 24: H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, Chapter 3 (handout);
Declaration of Independence (handout)

Thursday, January 26: Conrad Cherry, "Introduction," *God's new Israel* (handout); Abraham
Lincoln, "Second Inaugural" (handout)

3. Colonial, Revolutionary Narratives:

Tuesday, January 31: John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity" (handout); John White,
*The True Pictures and Fashions of the People in That Part of America now Called
Virginia*, William Bradford, excerpts; Arthur Barlowe, "First Voyage to
Virginia"

Thursday, February 2: Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, excerpts; William Byrd II,
Diary (handout); Maushop Story

Tuesday, February 7: Mary Rowlandson, *Narrative of the Captivity of Mary Rowlandson*; Anne
Bradstreet, Selected Poems

4. Antebellum America

Thursday, February 9: Lyman Beecher, *Plea for the West* (handout); Catherine Beecher,
Treatise on Domestic Economy, excerpts (handout); Chief Seattle, "Oration" (handout);
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Minister's Wooing*, 3-51

Tuesday, February 14: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Minister's Wooing*, 52-144

Thursday, February 16: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Minister's Wooing*, 145-203

Tuesday, February 21: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Minister's Wooing*, 204-290

Thursday, February 23: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Minister's Wooing*, 291-332

Friday, February 24: **Paper #1 Due by 5:00 pm**

Tuesday, February 28: Herman Melville, "Bartleby, The Scrivener" (handout)

Thursday, March 2: Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (handout);
Nat Turner, *Confession* (handout)

*****Spring Break*** Try to read as much of Frederic, *The Damnation of Theron Ware* as you can**

5. Postbellum, Modern America:

Tuesday, March 21: Josiah Strong, *Our Country*, excerpts (handout), Harold Frederic, *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, 1-104

Thursday, March 23: Harold Frederic, *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, 105-203

Tuesday, March 28: Harold Frederic, *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, 204-344

Thursday, March 30: Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, 1-108

Tuesday, April 4: Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, 109-251

Thursday, April 6: Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 9-109

Tuesday, April 11: Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 113-166

Thursday, April 13: Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 169-286

Tuesday, April 18: James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, 11-91

Thursday, April 20: James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, 92-150

Tuesday, April 25: James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, 152-221

Thursday, April 27: Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, 3-122

Tuesday, May 2: Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, 125-247

Thursday, May 4: Presentations

Tuesday, May 9: Presentations

Monday, May 15: **Second paper Due by 5 pm.**