

Philip K. Goff 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.

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I. Syllabus Justification

Religious Studies 350, Religion in the United States, is an elective course under the aegis of the Department of History, which runs the Religious Studies Program. Begun in the mid-1970s, the Religious Studies Program offers a minor that remains, shall we say, uncrowded. My appointment in the Department of History requires that I teach Introduction to Religious Studies twice per year (quarter system) as well as courses in American history, and my specialty. This allows me to teach Religion in the United States once each year. It is part of a three course sequence I teach, each building upon what I taught the previous quarter: in Fall, Renaissance and Reformation ; in Winter, Religion in the United States ; in Spring I teach a seminar on some particular aspect of American religious history (1994, Religion, Politics, and Social Control in America ; 1995, Religion and Culture in California History). Religion in the United States usually enrolls between twenty and twenty-five students; each class period lasts 100 minutes. The challenge of teaching it, like other courses, is the composition of the student body.

California State University, Los Angeles, is reportedly the most ethnically-diverse campus in the country. Founded in 1947 in east L.A. as the largely-anglo Los Angeles College for the Applied Arts, its surrounding demography has changed significantly in the past twenty years. Today it is a bustling, inner-city, commuter campus that hosts over 18,000 students in its undergraduate and graduate programs. Its undergraduate student body, which I deal with in eight of the nine courses I teach each year, proves a challenge I never faced when teaching my way through graduate school at the University of North Carolina: 42% Hispanic, 27% Asian, 12% White, 9% African American, and 10% unknown or native american. Women comprise 58% of the student body, whose average age is nearly 28. Most either have families of their own or are part of the family-support system in extended immigrant families. Obviously anyone teaching American religious history to such an audience must ask, Whose religious history do I teach? .

My training tended toward traditional church history until my final few years, when work with other professors allowed me to use my Master's training in History of Religions. Still, my course or two in ethnicity and religion left me unprepared for CSULA. For the first time I faced a class with more Buddhists

than Baptists, a classroom where Jesus would not only be one of the topics, he would be one of the students.

The students' lack of academic skills further complicated my dilemma. While some of their difficulties result from the painfully poor education system in Los Angeles County, the crux of the problem is language. Over half the undergraduates know English only as a second language. Many of them are extremely bright but have either fallen through the educational cracks or been passed over because of their difficulties with English.

With these things in mind, I geared Religious Studies 350 significantly different from my course in North Carolina. No longer feeling the need to teach about multi-culturalism--as it is a constant part of their lives in L.A.--I attempt to explain it. In other words, I can safely assume they know many of the cultural differences among their neighbors; my task is to help them understand why those differences exist. These students are more curious than others I've taught, perhaps because of their extensive life experiences. A broader approach that explains the basics works better for them than going in depth into several traditions or movements, which invariably leaves them asking what about ...? .

Admittedly, I am uncomfortable with a step back toward the it's Tuesday, it must be Methodists approach. To guard against that danger I've built into the course several major themes that we return to as touchstones throughout the quarter. Attempting to find themes that each of them can relate to on some level, I have settled on (1) immigration and migration, (2) race, ethnicity, and nationalism, (3) primitivism and iconoclasm, (4) ritual as worship and religious entertainment. I am clear from the outside--as seen in the syllabus--that these themes will resurface through the course, so students are not shocked when I begin to point them out the first week. After a few weeks I can ask them which theme is apparent in this part of the story, and they will struggle but find it. Toward the end of the course they recognize themes with no prompting on my part--sometimes they surprise me by discovering things I'd not seen before. I find this a good way to allow students the opportunity to interpret events, movements, or primary sources by their personal experiences with these themes. Their take-home exams require them to integrate the text, sources, lectures, discussions, and the themes--giving them ample opportunity to interact with the course over all.

My audience also caused me to change the type of readings I require. Previously I used fiction to teach this class. I employed a number of novels that got to the heart of issues in various periods. Unfortunately, but now unsurprisingly, only Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* succeeded here. Last year I alternated between fiction and several representative primary sources to see how students reacted. They were more excited about and better able to integrate these primary source materials than fiction. The only explanation I can offer for this is their difficulty in peeling back the layers of culture that exist not only between the present and the past, but also ethnic-national differences and the changing use of language. Irony proved particularly difficult for them. For example, last year's students never understood the civil religion in Mason Weem's life of Washington, but they quickly perceived the mixture of African survivals and evangelical Christianity in both Jarena Lee and Nat Turner. In all, they were better able to use biography as entries into the larger religious picture. I've attempted in the present syllabus to use short, representative pieces that I find they integrate better into the themes and coverage of the course without causing confusion. Moreover, I've worked assiduously to make certain these representative pieces do not return us to the great man method of teaching the past.

I also require students to attend three separate religious services during the quarter, each from a separate category. Since this is explained in the syllabus I will not go into detail here. Its purpose is to train students to look for a religious community's myth and worldview within its ritual. Their project, handed in at the end of the course, must relate their visits to the history of each group.

Finally, I found that these students absolutely require a textbook. Again, this experience contradicts what I found in North Carolina, where I provided the narrative for their primary readings. CSULA's students are

unfamiliar with many personalities and movements I could previously assume. I settled on Edwin Gaustad's *A Religious History of America* last year and it proved quite successful. It does not go into the potentially confusing detail that Williams and Albanese give. Meanwhile it offers more compelling coverage of Asian faiths than Hudson and Corrigan.

In all, I believe Religion in the United States grows increasingly successful as I learn more about my audience and better integrate traditional church history with history of religions categories that cut across lines more easily. The composition of the class made me rethink and retool the entire course, so the current product reflects not only the school but the city in which it is taught (which is especially obvious in the final class session). Obviously, the fun is not just in teaching students, but in being taught by them.

II. Introductory Course Syllabus

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 350: Religion in the United States

Introduction

But, since there is in all Men something like a natural principle, which inclines them to DEVOTION, or the Worship of some unseen Power; And since Men are endued with Reason superior to all other Animals, that we are in our World acquainted with; Therefore I think it seems required of me, and my Duty as a Man, to pay Divine Regards to SOMETHING. Benjamin Franklin, 1728

*Religion, religion. Oh there's a thin line between
Saturday night and Sunday morning. Here we go now.
All right altar boys.*

*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa
Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.
Where's the church, who took the steeple?
Religion's in the hands of some crazy ass people.
Television preachers with bad hair and dimples,
The God's honest truth is, it's not that simple.
It's the Buddhist in you, it's the Pagan in me,
It's the Muslim in him, she's Catholic ain't she?
It's that born again look, it's the WASP and the Jew
Tell me what's goin on, I ain't got a clue!* Jimmy Buffet, 1993

It is difficult to say which is more impressive, the variety of religions in America or the sheer volume of them. Drive down the average city street and you will doubtless pass more religious meeting places than convenient stores. And chances are, each one will look a little different, feel a little different, and even smell a little different than the one just down the block. Why? The purpose of this course is to help you unravel the fascinating and sometimes confusing story of religion in America. Beginning with the Native Americans, we will tour this subject through jaunts of immigration and the nation at war (sometimes with itself). But this will not simply be sightseeing entertainment, for you will interact with religious movements through historical sources and firsthand experience. In the immortal words of Bette Davis, Hold on, this could be a bumpy ride.

Readings

You are required to keep up with the daily reading so you can participate in class discussions. The textbook may be purchased at the bookstore in the Student Union. All other readings are on reserve at the front desk in JFK Library and in the History Office.

Textbook: Edwin Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1990).

Readings: On reserve in JFK Library and in the Department of History (24 hour reserve).

Themes of the Course

While we will trace numerous movements and individuals in the course, several themes will surface throughout that help us make sense of religion in America. By the end of the course you will be able to recognize each of these themes in the lectures and readings.

1. **Immigration/Migration:** Since humans were not indigenous to North America, the migration patterns of everyone from Native Americans twenty-thousand years ago to Vietnamese twenty years ago will play an important role in the course. How different cultures interact tells us a great deal about American religion.
2. **Race/Ethnicity/Nationalism:** Although these are distinct categories they are inseparably linked together. Our task will be to recognize how they relate to one another in our religious past--what it means to have cultures within the larger culture, nations within a nation.
3. **Primitivism/Iconoclasm:** These refer to the Protestant tradition of constantly overthrowing the current religious hierarchy in an attempt to return to the primitive, or early, Christian church. Invariably another tradition arises out of the protest, and in time someone will attempt to overthrow it, thereby creating yet another religious tradition. We will see that by the twentieth century this cycle extends beyond American Protestantism.
4. **Ritual:** Religious ceremonies serve numerous purposes. The most obvious is the expression of beliefs through worship--retelling the community's story through meaningful acts. At the same time, there is an element of religious entertainment taking place. Religious rituals, then, show not only how a tradition understands itself but also how it attempts to attract the audience's attention. We will watch closely to see how this dual-edged phenomenon plays itself out in various religious communities.

Grading

Your final grade will consist of four components. The following is an explanation of each and their value in figuring your final grade.

1. **Exams:** You will have four take-home exams (including the final exam) throughout the quarter. You will have a choice among several questions for each exam. Your exam must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides, and should be around four pages long. Do not use binders! Simply staple your paper in the upper-left corner. Each exam is worth 50 points for a total of 200 points.
2. **Participation:** Every course is as interesting and fun as you are willing to make it. I believe in active learning--so come prepared to ask questions and discuss the issues at hand each day. The best way to do that is to keep up on the reading. Always be sure to have the reading done before class. Your participation is worth 50 points.
3. **Quizzes:** There will be several unannounced quizzes on the reading due that day. These will be in the form of either multiple choice or short essay questions. This will encourage you to come to class prepared. Your quizzes will total 50 points.

4. Project: Knowing how to categorize religions according to their beliefs or histories only goes so far to help you understand the variety of religions in America. Therefore, you are required to view three specific religious traditions in action. I have included in the syllabus a helpful guide to aid your field work. You are required to take notes on your visits to three religious ceremonies (marriages and funerals do not count) and then write an eight-paged essay in which you relate each service's distinctions and how the ceremony reflects the history of that group. Your class notes and readings will help you put these visits into their historical context. We will talk at greater length about this project as the quarter proceeds. Your project will be handed in with your final exam and is worth 100 points.

To Guarantee a Grade

A = 360 or more points
B = 320 to 359 points
C = 280 to 319 points
D = 240 to 279 points
F = below 240 points

Policy on Incompletes, Withdrawals, and Written Work

I will assign a grade of Incomplete only for those students who have completed two-thirds (2/3) of the work required for the course, except for those students with special permission from the Dean's Office. All others must either finish the course or, if a valid reason is given, withdraw from the course.

I will not allow a student to withdraw from the course after the seventh week, except in cases of emergency or with permission from the Dean's Office.

Since so many papers are shuffled around each quarter, I require that you keep a second copy of any written work handed in to me. This precludes any problems if either of us misplace an assignment.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Part One: Pre-Colonial and Colonial North America

JAN

02 Introduction to the Course

Native American Religion

READ: Gaustad ch. 1

04 When Worlds Collide: Native Americans and European Colonization

FILM: Inside the California Missions

READ: Gaustad ch. 2 and 3

Black Elk, excerpts from Black Elk Speaks

09 Protestant Reformation and the New England Puritans

READ: Gaustad ch. 4, 6, 7

John Winthrop, A Modell of Christian Charity

Mary Rowlandson, from The Captive

11 Southern and Middle Colonies: Anglicans, Africans, and Pluralism

READ: Gaustad ch. 5, 8, 10

William Penn, from Primitive Christianity Revived

16 Varieties of Unbelief and the Christianization of the Colonies

Exam One handed out today.
READ: Gaustad ch. 9, 11
Nathan Cole, *Spiritual Travels*

Part Two: Creating American Religious Traditions

Jan

18 The Great Awakening's Affects: Reason, Revivalism, and Revolution
READ: Gaustad ch. 12

Thomas Paine, from *Age of Reason*

23 Republicanism and Revivalism: Creating the Evangelical Empire

Exam One due today.

READ: Gaustad ch. 13

Charles Finney, from *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*

25 Slave Religion and the Development of African American Christianity

READ: Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experiences of Jarena Lee*

Nat Turner, *Confessions*

30 The American Religion: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

Exam Two handed out today.

READ: Gaustad, ch. 14

Brigham Young, TBA

FEB

01 From Sex to Slavery: Social Reform and Utopian Communities

FILM: *Shakers: Hands to Work, Hearts to God*

READ: Gaustad, ch. 15

Part Three: The Changing Face of America

Feb

06 Religion and Ethnicity in 19th-century America: Jews and Catholics in a Protestant World

Exam Two due today.

READ: Gaustad ch. 16, 19

Isaac Wise, from *American Israelite*

James Cardinal Gibbons, Letter Defending the Knights of Labor

08 Film: *The Chosen*

READ: Gaustad ch. 17, 18

13 Cultural Transformations: Industrialization, Darwinism, and Higher Criticism

READ: Gaustad ch. 20

Mark Twain, *Adam's Diary and Eve's Diary*

15 Back to the Future: Premillennial and Postmillennial Worldviews and Social Behavior

READ: Ellen White, from *Testimonies*

Shelton, from *In His Steps*

20 East is East and West is West, and Ever the Twain Shall Seek

Exam Three handed out today.

READ: Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, from *The Secret Doctrine*

Part Four: Religious Pluralism and Redefining America

Feb

22 Searching for the Authority: Catholics and Dissenting Protestants in a Modern World

READ: Gaustad ch. 22

J. Gresham Machen, from Liberalism and Christianity

Harry Emerson Fosdick, Shall the Fundamentalists Win?

Excerpt from meeting of Full Gospel Business Men's Assoc. (1966)

27 Harmonial Religions

Exam Three due today.

READ: Anne Morrow Lindbergh, from Gifts from the Sea

Norman Vincent Peale, from The Power of Positive Thinking

Deepak Chopra, from The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success

29 Race and Religion in the Twentieth Century: Ethnicity, Immigrants, and the Meaning of America

READ: Gaustad ch. 23

Malcolm X, from Autobiography

Richard Rodriguez, from Hunger for Memory

MAR

05 Coalition Religion and the Meaning of America: Civil Rights,

Ecumenism, and the Christian Coalition

Final Exam handed out today.

READ: Martin Luther King, TBA

Ralph Reed, TBA

07 Religion in the City of Angeles: Local Religious Culture in its Larger Context

READ: TBA

12 FINAL EXAMINATION due at 5:00

Course Project

In order to help you get the feel for American religion, you are required to attend three religious services, record your findings, and relate them in a paper (around eight pages) that is handed in with your final exam. The purpose of this is to help you understand the various styles of worship among America's many religions. For instance, simply knowing how to categorize Episcopalians and Baptists on a chart only goes so far in aiding your overall knowledge of these groups. While the classroom experience will teach you differences in historical roots and doctrines, it cannot convey the dissimilarities of worship--that part of the religious life groups hold most dear. The purpose is not for you to have, or even remotely encourage you to have, a religious experience at these services. Rather, you are there as a researcher, asking critical questions about what is taking place around you.

Your three visits must fall into three separate categories. Although no demarcation is as clean as we academics might like, I offer these categories to help you. You should speak with me before you attend a service to make sure we agree on which group your visit that week might fulfill.

Category One: Traditional High Church Christian - Roman Catholic masses, Episcopal, and Lutheran services usually fall into this category.

Category Two: Mainstream American Christian - This describes a large, rather amorphous group of American churches that developed along with the American democracy. Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches are your best bets here. Unlike some others, I include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) under this category.

Category Three: Dissenting Protestant, Ethnic, and Alternative Faiths - This one is obviously very open. Since your previous two choices were basically Christian, I suggest you opt for one of the Asian religions under this category. If, however, you grew up in an Asian tradition, I suggest you sample one of the Dissenting Christian faiths, perhaps Jehovah's Witnesses or Christian Science. Of course, a trip to a Jewish synagogue is always an option. Talk with me before you choose one for this category so I can make certain you are going to a service that complements your previous choices.

Do not be frightened by this requirement! Students have invariably enjoyed this aspect of the course. If you are apprehensive about going to one of the groups listed, choose another under that category or ask a classmate to go with you.

In writing your final project, you must briefly describe each service. The bulk of your essay, however, must relate each service to the history of that movement. In other words--how did the service you attended reflect the history of that particular religious movement?

Helpful Hints for Your Project

Remember, you are visiting these services as an observer. Gather as much information as possible to help you understand each movement. Often they will offer printed information about themselves--make sure to read it!

With all this in mind, I offer a few categories for you to use as guides in your excursions. These are not the only things you should take note of, but they will help you begin thinking critically during the services.

Leaders

Is there one person who controls most of the meeting?
Were the leaders set apart by clothing? How large a part do others, particularly the audience, play in the ceremony? Is there much interaction between the leader(s) and the audience?

Message

How long was it? Was it the central part of the service? What place did scripture have in it? Was it well reasoned or did it play to the emotional side of the audience?

Architecture

Is the building plain or ornate? Does the structure relate anything particular about this group? Are there many religious symbols (crosses, candles, banners, images)? How is the platform arranged? What does this tell you what this group considers most important?

Singing

Was there much, or any, singing? How would you characterize it--somber, lively, emotional, dead? What part, if any, did the songs play in the overall experience?

Ritual

How intricate was it? Was there much standing, sitting, bowing, etc., for the audience? Was the service difficult to follow for the uninitiated? How important was ritual to the overall experience in this service?

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I suggest you take note of these things in your head during the service and then write them down immediately after the ceremony. Most important, review your entire experience at each service with the knowledge of that group you gained from the classroom and reading.