

Tracy Neal Leavelle
Creighton University
Department of History
American Religions: In Search of the Promised Land

INTRODUCTION

Institutional context: Creighton University is a Catholic Jesuit institution in Omaha, Nebraska. The overall student population is more than 6,000 if one includes the professional and graduate programs. The Department of History, however, resides in the College of Arts and Sciences, which enrolls around 2,500 students and functions largely as a small, private, Catholic liberal arts college. Most students are Catholic, but the meaning of this label varies widely. A deep faith and regular participation in Catholic ritual motivate some, while others came to Creighton simply for the excellent education in a comfortable and familiar Catholic environment. Many students cultivate a strong social consciousness that supports an obvious dedication to community service. The Creighton University mission statement explains that “Creighton's education ... is directed to the intellectual, social, spiritual, physical and recreational aspects of student's lives and to the promotion of justice.” The students have an awareness of this mission and many of them live it with passion.

Development of the course: I first developed this class as a special topics course in the Department of History in 2005. The two American religious history courses already in the curriculum were very traditional in content and organization, with a chronological division at the Civil War. At the time, I did not expect to be able to offer both courses on a reasonable rotation, so I designed a more thematically-oriented course that could evolve over time. The first version of the class seemed to lack focus, so I completely revised the syllabus to emphasize religion and place in the search for the Promised Land. There is in fact only one common reading between the first and second syllabi.

The new focus provides a way of introducing students to a variety of critical issues in the history of American religions, as indicated by the unit titles. Creighton students receive extensive training in Christian theology as part of the core curriculum, but their understanding of the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of religion is limited. I developed this course to present these perspectives in the American context. The design introduces students to American Indian religious concepts and practices, which will complement the coursework on Christianity.

I intend to add the course to the regular catalogue, most likely as a 400-level, upper-division course. I may request that course the meet the certified writing requirement for the core curriculum. Certified writing courses must include a certain number and length of writing assignments as well as opportunities for revision of drafts.

Pedagogical approach: The class is currently capped at twenty-five and serves primarily history and theology students at the upper-division level. The size and composition of the class encourage a discussion-based approach to course material, which includes primary and secondary sources, images and film, interviews and site visits. I lecture only as needed to provide context for discussion, and I prefer projects, papers, and student presentations to exams.

A Blackboard course site creates a space for the continuation of discussion beyond the walls of the classroom. The workload for the course is heavy for Creighton. It may be at the very limits of what I can reasonably expect from students. On the other hand, I find that high expectations for both the quantity and quality of student work tend to promote excellence.

History 4xx
American Religions: In Search of the Promised Land

Creighton University
Tuesday / Thursday

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religious communities and inspired individuals have through time discovered in America a seemingly ideal place to pursue their hopeful visions of purity, truth, and salvation. We will explore in this course the vibrant, contentious, and unfinished story of this ongoing search for the Promised Land. Together, we will examine the mutual influences of religion and American culture through studies of diverse religious communities with a particular emphasis on the intersection between religion and place. Specific issues for consideration include concepts of home and sacred space, religious dimensions of the conquest of America, religion and nature, the faith and practices of exile communities, and the influence of border culture on religion. Students will also participate in an ongoing project mapping Omaha religious landscapes. The project involves site visits, interviews, research in local historical material, and the use of advanced GPS and GIS technology.

Comments: In this course description, I highlight the primary organizing concept for the semester: the search for a promised land in America. I raise right away issues of religious diversity and conflict and explain to students that the course will not be a triumphalist narrative of Christian establishment in America.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. KNOW: students should be able to articulate major trends and analyze specific examples in the history and historical interpretation of religion in the United States with a particular emphasis on the intersection between religion and place.
2. DO: students should demonstrate the ability to engage in a process of historical inquiry into the meaning and significance of these histories through discussion of primary and secondary sources as well as participation in a semester-long project on local religious landscapes.
3. CONNECT: students should demonstrate the ability to place contemporary issues and local concerns in their broader historical contexts.

Comments: I have adopted in all of my courses this model of describing course objectives. Creighton requires that instructors make their objectives clear, and we are working as an institution toward the creation of objectives that can be measured through fairly simple assessment techniques. In this case, I want students to understand that knowing is only one part of the learning process. We know so that we can do. I expect even beginning students to develop basic skills in historical inquiry.

REQUIRED TEXTS (Available for Purchase)

Catherine L. Albanese, *Nature Religion in America from the Algonkian Indians to the New Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Larry Evers and Ofelia Zepeda, *Home Places: Contemporary Native American Writing from Sun Tracks* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995).

Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* [Expanded edition] (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

Luis D. León, *La Llorona's Children: Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969).

Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

ADDITIONAL READINGS (Available through Electronic Reserve)

Keith H. Basso, "Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape" in Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds., *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 53-90.

David Bjelajac, "Thomas Coles' *Oxbow* and the American Zion Divided" in *American Art* 20 (Spring 2006): 60-83.

Henry Warner Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions: Studies in Cultural Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 25-58.

Sally A. Kitt Chappell, *Cahokia: Mirror of the Cosmos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 50-75.

David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, "Introduction" in Chidester and Linenthal, eds., *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1-42.

- William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 54-81.
- Vine Deloria, Jr., "Sacred Lands and Religious Freedom" in Deloria, Jr., *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1999), 203-213
- — —, "Out of Chaos" in *For This Land*, 243-9.
- — —, "Reflection and Revelation: Knowing Land, Places, and Ourselves" in *For This Land*, 250-60.
- Matthew Dennis, *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace: Iroquois- European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 11-115.
- Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 52-85.
- Tracy Neal Leavelle, "Geographies of Encounter: Religion and Contested Spaces in Colonial North America" in *American Quarterly* 56 (December 2004): 913-43.
- Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 69-121.
- Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), excerpts.
- Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, "Eastward Ho! American Religion from the Perspective of the Pacific Rim" in Thomas A. Tweed, ed., *Retelling US Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), ch. 5.
- Robert A. Orsi, "Introduction: Crossing the City Line" in Orsi, *Gods of the City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1-78.
- Kathleen Stewart and Susan Harding, "Bad Endings: American Apocalypsis" in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28 (1999): 285-310.
- Bron Taylor, "Resacralizing the Earth: Pagan Environmentalism and the Restoration of Turtle Island" in Chidester and Linenthal, eds., *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 97-151.

DOCUMENTS (Available through Electronic Reserve)

- "A Navajo Emergence Story" and "The Iroquois Great League of Peace" in Colin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*, 2d ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004), 33-55.

Peter C. Mancall, ed. *Envisioning America: English Plans for the Colonization of North America, 1580-1640* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1995), excerpts.

John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630).

Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682).

Charles Wilson Hackett, ed., *Revolt of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Otermín's Attempted Reconquest, 1680-1682*, 2 vols. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1970 [1942]), excerpts.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1836).

"Tenskwatawa (the Shawnee Prophet) Relates His Journey to the World Above, 1810" and "John L. O'Sullivan Defines 'Manifest Destiny,' 1845" in Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman and Jon Gjerde, *Major Problems in American History*, Vol. 1, *To 1877* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 205-7 and 240-1.

Joseph Smith and Brigham Young on Zion (TBD).

Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" [1893] in Richard W. Etulain, ed., *Does the Frontier Experience Make America Exceptional?* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), 17-43.

Simon Pokagon, "Simon Pokagon Offers *The Red Man's Greeting*" [1893] in Frederick E. Hoxie, ed., *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 29-35.

Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Layton UT: Gibbs Smith, 1985), excerpts.

FILMS

500 Nations (Jack Leustig, 1995).

Cabeza de Vaca (Nicolás Echevarría, 1992).

American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America (Robert Hughes, 1997).

In the Light of Reverence (Christopher McLeod, 2001).

Fires in the Mirror (Anna Deavere Smith, 1993).

SITE VISITS

Creighton University and St John's Church

North Omaha tour [majority African-American community]

South Omaha tour [traditional immigrant entry point for more than 100 years]

St Cecilia's Cathedral (Omaha NE)

Omaha Hindu Temple

Holy Family Shrine (Gretna NE)
Mormon Trail Center at Historic Winter Quarters (Omaha NE)

ASSIGNMENTS

Class participation / attendance: the course is designed to promote active learning through critical analysis of sources, intensive discussion, and cooperative activities. Participation (as well as attendance in general) is expected and is part of the course grade. Regular participation from everyone will be essential to the success of our intellectual endeavors. Student-led discussions will also provide more formal opportunities for participation. Hopefully, the modest size of our group will help everyone feel especially comfortable as contributing members of the class.

On-line discussions: one or two students each week will be responsible for posting an analytical question and preliminary response to the discussion forum on the Blackboard site. The question and response should address an important issue, problem, argument, theme, and/or example from the reading assignments, films, or other material. Other students will offer their thoughts and commentary during the week. The discussion leaders should post their question and response by Monday at 6 pm. Other discussants should post by Wednesday at 6 pm. Discussion leaders will then help guide the in-class conversations.

An analytical question and response engages and does not simply describe the contents of the piece in question. Your responses should be only 1-2 paragraphs (one-half to one page) long and must cite specific supporting examples. These brief assignments will typically provide a way to begin or to organize our in-class discussions and activities.

Omaha Religious Landscapes Project (ORLP): Together, we will explore the changing religious landscape of Omaha. We will map congregations, religious institutions, and sites of religious significance over time using city directories, local histories, archival material, interviews and self-reflection, and site visits. In this way, we will take advantage of local historical resources and begin making connections between the religious history of Omaha and the rest of the nation. The project will include individual research, writing, and oral presentation components as well as a collaborative element. There are five phases in the project.

Phase 1: Reflect [Write about a place that has great personal significance]

Phase 2: Observe [Take field notes about a religious space in Omaha]

Phase 3: Listen [Interview a member of the community about religion and place]

Phase 4: Analyze [Map change over time in the Omaha religious landscape]

Phase 5: Synthesize [Make connections between local and wider histories]

Comments: I have had success with a student-designed class project in my survey of US history to 1877. Students in my research methods course have also enjoyed working with local resources. In this case, I plan to bring these approaches together. If the project works well, I will supervise a new stage each time I teach the course. The students and I could eventually construct a fairly sophisticated history of religion in Omaha, something that does not currently exist. The five phases of the project should encourage a systematic search for patterns of

emergence, development, movement, and change. They also support the course objectives of knowing, doing, and connecting.

GRADES

Participation / On-line discussions / Attendance	20 %
ORLP Phase 1: Reflect	10 %
ORLP Phase 2: Observe	15 %
ORLP Phase 3: Listen	15 %
ORLP Phase 4: Analyze	20 %
ORLP Phase 5: Synthesize	20 %

General guidelines for grades: A = 90 to 100 percent; B+ = 87 to 89 percent; B = 80 to 86 percent; C+ = 77 to 79 percent; C = 70 to 76 percent; D = 60 to 69 percent; and F = less than 60 percent.

Discussion of individual grades will take place not less than two days and no more than seven days after the graded assignment is returned. You must return the assignment in question and provide an explanation of the reasons you believe a grade should be adjusted.

CONTACTING THE INSTRUCTOR

I encourage you to keep in touch. My office hours, office phone number, and e-mail address are at the top of this syllabus. I will be most readily available during office hours. If you are unable to attend regular office hours, please arrange for a special appointment. I check e-mail often (except on weekends) and will get back to you as soon as possible, usually within a day.

In case of an unexpected class cancellation due to inclement weather or some other reason, I will try to notify all students through the Blackboard course site announcement feature and via e-mail.

RULES AND EXPECTATIONS

Class culture: some of the subjects that we will cover in class will be controversial and I want our meetings to be vibrant and engaging. In order to maintain a positive atmosphere for the free exchange of ideas, the culture we create together in this class must be based on mutual respect. I promise to respect you as individuals, as students, and as a class. You must promise, in turn, to respect your fellow students and me. If we behave courteously, we will form a positive learning environment where people can safely ask questions, participate freely, and learn effectively. Disruption of class and other negative behavior are counterproductive to successful teaching and learning and will not be tolerated.

Attendance: regular attendance is expected. More than two unexcused absences will result in a lower final grade, with the penalty increasing with the number of absences. Additionally, please come to class on time and do not leave early. Late arrivals and early departures disrupt class.

Reading: reading must be completed for the day it is assigned. Classes will not be simply an explanation of the reading. *Please bring assigned reading to class each day.*

Academic honesty: this course is governed by the Policy on Academic Honesty of the College of Arts and Sciences. Students should meet the highest standards of academic honesty. All forms of student academic dishonesty, including cheating, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism are strictly prohibited. Cheating means using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids. Plagiarism means representing the words or ideas of another as one's own. Anyone breaking these important rules will receive a penalty up to and including failure of the class and will be subject to college sanctions according to the regulations and procedures of the College of Arts and Sciences. For details on this policy, see the current *Creighton University Bulletin—Undergraduate Issue* or the following web address: <http://puffin.creighton.edu/ccas/policies/acadhonesty.html>

Syllabus: I reserve the right to make additions and changes to the syllabus as necessary.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit 1 / Introduction: Thinking About Religion and Place in America (Wks 1-2)

- Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred* (Introduction and Part I)
- Chidester and Linenthal, *American Sacred Space* (Introduction)
- Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* (Introduction and Ch 1)
- Orsi, *Gods of the City* (Introduction)
- Deloria, Jr., *For This Land* (“Reflection and Revelation” and “Sacred Lands and Religious Freedom”)

Comments: These works form a theoretical foundation for analyzing the intersection between religion and place in America. They introduce students to advanced work on sacred space, urban religion, ideas about home and homeland, and American Indian concepts of place.

Unit 2 / Homelands: Before America (Wk 3)

- Documents: “A Navajo Emergence Story” and “The Iroquois Great League of Peace”
- Chappell, *Cahokia: Mirror of the Cosmos* (Ch 3)
- Dennis, *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace* (Part I)
- Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred* (ch 3)
- Film: *500 Nations* (excerpts on Chaco Canyon and Cahokia)

Comments: This unit reminds students that there were homelands before there was an America. We will practice the reading and analysis of Native oral traditions and look at Cahokia and Chaco Canyon as examples of designed spaces that reflected religious, economic, and social concerns in ancient societies.

Unit 3 / Imagining America (Wk 4)

- Documents: Mancall, *Envisioning America*
 - Richard Hakluyt (the elder), “Inducements to the Liking of the Voyage Intended towards Virginia” (1585)
 - Thomas Harriot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1590)
 - Images by Theodor de Bry and John White
 - John Winthrop, “Reasons to be Considered for Justifying the Undertakers of the Intended Plantation in New England” (1629)
- Document: Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity”
- Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*
- Film: *Cabeza de Vaca*

Comments: The documents in this unit reveal English interpretations of the significance of the New World and perceptions of its Native inhabitants. The Greenblatt piece is broader and places the early colonial experience in the context of a long history of European encounters with difference and the sense of wonder these encounters evoked. The wonderful Mexican film Cabeza de Vaca interprets the classic colonial narrative with creativity and insight. The film presents Cabeza de Vaca as a disoriented man struggling not only to survive his painful odyssey but also to maintain his sense of identity as a Christian and a Spaniard in a strange land.

Unit 4 / Conquering Canaan (Wks 5-6)

- Document: Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*
- Documents: Hackett, *Revolt of the Pueblo Indians* (excerpts)
- Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred* (chs 4-5)
- Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (ch 4)
- Lepore, *The Name of War* (chs 3-4)
- Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions* (ch 4)
- Leavelle, “Geographies of Encounter”

Comments: These documents and readings examine the ways that religion and evolving religious ideologies shaped conquest, resistance, and the creation of colonial societies in New England, New France, and New Spain.

Unit 5 / Living in the Garden (Wks 7-8)

- Document: Emerson, *Nature*
- Bjelajac, “Thomas Cole’s *Oxbow*”
- Albanese, *Nature Religion in America*
- Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred* (ch 6)
- Film: *American Visions* (excerpts)

Comments: The way people have identified and cultivated links between the physical and spiritual worlds forms the subject for these two weeks. The unit builds on what the

students have already learned about diverse American Indian communities with an examination of Shakers, Transcendentalists, American artists, and others who have expressed their thoughts on the spiritual significance of these connections.

Unit 6 / Locating Zion: Land, Destiny, and Prophetic Resistance (Wk 9)

- Documents: “Tenskwatawa (the Shawnee Prophet) Relates His Journey to the World Above, 1810” and “John L. O’Sullivan Defines ‘Manifest Destiny,’ 1845”
- Documents: Joseph Smith and Brigham Young
- Document: Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier”
- Pokagon, *The Red Man’s Greeting*

Comments: The readings in this unit contrast claims of America as Promised Land with American Indian perspectives on conquest, loss, resistance, and redemption in the nineteenth century.

Unit 7 / Home and Exile: Centers, Margins, and Borders (Wks 10-14)

- Tweed, *Our Lady of Exile*
- León, *La Llorona’s Children*
- Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*
- Evers and Zepeda, *Home Places*
- Basso, “Wisdom Sits in Places”
- Deloria, Jr., *For This Land* (“Out of Chaos”)
- Maffly-Kipp, “Eastward Ho!”
- Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred* (ch 7)
- Film: Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*
- Film: *In the Light of Reverence*

Comments: The longest unit of the course requires students to approach problems of religion and place from several different geographic perspectives. Home and exile provide the organizing poles for the analysis. Specific topics for exploration include: American Indian homelands, migration and memory, and the struggle to maintain connections to place; transnational religious communities and phenomena; urban conflict; and the United States as part of the Pacific Rim.

Unit / Saving the Promised Land (Wk 15)

- Documents: Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology* (excerpts)
- Steward and Harding, “Bad Endings”
- Taylor, “Resacralizing the Earth”
- Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred* (chs 8-10)

Comments: The concluding section of the course emphasizes anxiety and the promise of redemption in this world or a world to come.