

Rodger Payne 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. Katherine Albanese of the University of California, Santa Barbara. 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.

I. Syllabus Justification

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College is an over-populated (25,000 students), state supported Southern university located in Baton Rouge, the state capital and one of Louisiana's major metropolitan urban areas (metro population approximately 500,000). Although we have a diverse student body representing most states and numerous foreign countries, the undergraduate population is drawn largely from Louisiana. Popular majors include various agricultural related fields, engineering, and an amorphous program called "General Studies," although the College of Arts and Sciences enrolls the largest number of undergraduates (3,500 students) of the university's eight colleges. The Religious Studies Program began only in 1980 as a part of the Philosophy Department and currently remains a program of that department, although separate departmental status may be obtained in the near future. As a state university, we depend primarily on students choosing our courses as electives, although we have been able to have some introductory courses approved as general education distribution requirements. The approved introductory courses draw quite well (100+ students), but numbers are small beyond these, averaging under 20 students. Thus the Religious Studies program encourages its faculty to cross-list courses whenever possible to increase student ability to apply the course to undesignated distribution requirements and to draw majors from other departments into our courses; e.g., since this course is cross-listed in both the history and religious studies curriculums, majors in both areas can count this course toward their major requirements.

Recent attempts to raise entrance requirements (at least a 2.3 GPA is now required; a few years ago only a Louisiana high school diploma was needed) and to improve LSU's standing as the flagship university of the state system have resulted in increased student retention and better faculty morale, and the Religious Studies Program has benefitted with new faculty positions, a decreased course load for faculty, and increased student interest in our offerings. In short, although we still receive students from the worst state school system in the country and continue to be plagued with the reputation of being a party school and a football factory, the university is making a serious effort to improve instruction and research.

Course: Previous to my arrival in the fall of 1991, REL/HIST 4161 was the only course offered at LSU in American religion and had been established by the History Department as an upper division/graduate (4000 level) course and cross-listed with Religious Studies. It was taught irregularly at best and typically drew 8-

10 students, but the first time I taught the course (in the fall of 1991), fifty students were enrolled for the class. I plan to limit the course to no more than 30-35 students in the future.

LSU appointed me to teach this course and to build on it by offering a wider variety of specialized courses in American religious history. Although it is rather awkward to have a survey course at the senior/graduate level, the course will remain at the 4000 level for various political reasons largely involving the History Department.

One advantage of having the course at this level is that I can expect more from the students in terms of writing assignments, amount and degree of difficulty in reading assignments, etc. I am also currently discussing with the appropriate history faculty the division of the present course into a two semester course (i.e., 4160 would cover the colonial period to the Civil War and 4161 would continue to the present) that will allow more comprehensive coverage worthy of a 4000 level course. Cross-listing carries its disadvantages as well.

Comments: LSU is the third college/university where I have taught an introductory course in American religion, and the course continues to evolve during each incarnation. My general approach combines a topical template with a loose chronological structure; this seems to work best with the readings and book review assignments. I also use this approach to keep major subtopics (e.g., Catholicism and Judaism, African American religions) together in an effort to improve their historical coherence; the drawback to this of course is a seeming "ghettoization" of these topics. I try to lessen this separateness by attention to the larger themes of the course during the lectures on these topics; e.g., how have African Americans, Jews, and Catholics related themselves to the ideas of America as a Promised Land? How have they been viewed by "mainstream" white Protestants?

Each class meeting is planned with its own particular theme, thesis, and title although the major themes (e.g., pluralism and consensus) are woven throughout the course as a means of providing continuity. This makes for tightly organized individual lectures that students find clear (according to their comments on class evaluations) but overburdened, I think, with information. I would like to reduce each class presentation/lecture to a manageable question or "problem" that could be discussed in order to illumine some larger aspect of the American religious experience; current presentations that serve as models of this type include a slide presentation and discussion of religious themes in the art of the Hudson River School (week 7) and discussion Catholic devotionalism as a defensive mechanism used by immigrants which I illustrate with a "show and tell" of devotional items (I find that students are very visually oriented, and experience the most success when some type of visual aids are used). I hope the extension of the course to two semesters will allow for more attention to presentations of this nature.

A) Texts: My choice of texts for the course are governed by two concerns: 1) My reluctance to use a single general textbook because I've yet to find one that organizes material parallel to my lecture organization (and I'm too stubborn to adjust to their organization), and 2) I believe that most students need to learn to move away from the reading of a book as only a means to gain scattered bits of information and learn rather to read books critically and analytically. I make available (for optional purchase or on reserve) a general text for background reading but warn students that their purchase of the text does not obligate me to teach from it; they may use it however it best helps them to gain a more comprehensive knowledge about the subject matter. I'm still undecided on how well this works; students complain when they don't have access to such a text, but they also complain when I don't make constant reference to one they have purchased. Placing one on reserve avoids these problems, but with a larger class, having a text available only on reserve limits access. The bookstore discourages the use of "recommended" texts because of a shortage of shelf space, but designating the general text as such may also be a solution.

I am very pleased, however, with the use of shorter "thesis" texts (i.e., the five required texts listed in the syllabus) as a means of 1) providing students with quality reading material that presents a strong thesis or

narrative rather than bits of information, 2) providing, by way of book reviews, a method of evaluation that lessens the emphasis on exams and focuses on developing clear and effective communication skills, and 3) provoking discussion. What most students need, I believe, is simply to learn how to read, and since they only read general textbooks for information in preparation for exams, they never learn this skill. Thus I use the shorter texts for which they prepare a review and come to class prepared to discuss the thesis, themes, arguments, organization, etc. of the book rather than simply memorize information. Some of the books on this syllabus (McLoughlin, Orsi, Malcolm X) are excellent for this type of exercise; others (Bowden, Marsden) are not as satisfactory and I'm looking for good replacements. Additionally, since books such as McLoughlin or Malcolm X present viewpoints or interpretations different from my own, they provide a better basis for discussion and demonstrate to students that interpretation and perspective in history is perhaps more important than its "mechanics."

Other text options are available with this approach. I have used some fiction in the past (e.g., Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* and Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*, both available in modern editions) and would consider using all fiction at some time in the future. Using all autobiography would also provide a promising alternative. One problem with this approach is that I think students have enough reading and so do not attempt to expose them to original source materials by way of an anthology or a reading packet. I have used such packets in the past and found them most useful for the pre-1865 period. Students also have trouble interpreting some documents which means class time becomes only a discussion of the document. If this course is extended over two semesters, thus giving me more class time to devote to such discussions, I may try to combine the use of some primary sources with the use of "thesis" texts.

B) Weaknesses: As with any course, there are still many lacuna and other problems with this course that I have yet to satisfactorily resolve. One is the aforementioned separation of Catholicism, Judaism, and African American religions into their own categories, which provides a satisfactory internal coherence but does tend to suggest that these traditions be viewed in isolation from "mainstream" white Protestant culture. While gender issues are not treated separately, I do give some attention to such in presentations on communitarian communities, Victorian Protestantism, and Catholic devotionalism, but admittedly these intermittent appearances do not lend themselves to strong historical coherence. Asian religions make an appearance only in the discussion of the 1960s counterculture and Islam only in the unorthodox form of the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X. Native American religions do receive brief attention in their "precontact" form, but after that time function only in relation to European and Christian contact. Most of these problems can be better addressed over a two-semester sequence

II. Course Syllabus

REL/HIST 4161: Religion in the United States

Louisiana State University
Dr. Rodger Payne

Religion forms a significant part of the rich cultural mosaic of American civilization. But what does it mean to speak of American religion? On one level, the freedoms guaranteed in the First Amendment have encouraged the most religiously variegated society in the Western world; Americans share no common theology or religious customs. On a deeper level, however, a pervasive religious self-understanding has contributed to a strong cultural consensus that crosses denominational distinctions: America is a new "promised land" populated by a new "chosen people." This course is an intensive survey of religion and religions in America that addresses this question of radical religious pluralism vs. common cultural identity. Rather than follow a strict chronological survey, we will investigate certain themes in American religious history that best demonstrate the conflicts and accommodations between pluralism and consensus.

Texts:

The following required texts are available in the LSU Union Bookstore and copies are on reserve in Middleton library.

1. Henry W. Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions* (Chicago: Univ Chicago Press, 1981)
2. William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: Univ Chicago Press, 1978)
3. George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991)
4. Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street* (New Haven: Yale, 1985)
5. Malcolm X, *Autobiography* (New York; Ballantine, 1965)

Hudson and Corrigan, *Religion in America*, 5th edition (New York: Macmillan, 1991) is available for purchase in the Bookstore as a recommended background text.

Course Requirements:

1. Regular class attendance and active participation is expected; excessive absences will lower your grade.
2. Four book reviews, each 3-4 pages long, are to be turned in on the discussion days listed below. Reviews are due at the beginning of the class and you must remain for the discussion in order for the review to be accepted. You may choose which four of the five texts you will review; you may elect to submit a fifth review in order to drop your lowest grade (each review worth 15% of total grade).
3. An in-class midterm exam (15%) and a final examination (25%) on the dates indicated. Students must take the final exam on the scheduled date unless they qualify for an extension from the college.

Course Outline

A. Clash of Cultures: Native and European Religions

Wk 1 Course introduction

Native American religious traditions

The missions of the Spanish Borderlands

Wk 2 Spirituality and the missions of New France

Revitalization movements (Handsome Lake and the Ghost Dance)

DISCUSSION OF BOWDEN (1st review due)

B. Civic and Civil Religion in America

Wk 3 Anglicanism and church architecture in the colonial South

New England Puritanism

The Enlightenment in America

Wk 4 Continuing the Revolution: The American religious settlement

Onward Christian soldiers: Religion and American imperialism

Forms of civil religion in the United States

C. Awakenings and Revivalism

Wk 5 Pietism and the "Great Awakening"

Antebellum revivalism and benevolence

Revivalism from Moody to Sunday

Wk 6 Billy Graham and the post-war revival of the 1950s

The healing and charismatic revivals

DISCUSSION OF MCLOUGHLIN (2nd review due)

D. Building the Protestant Empire: Consolidation and Challenges

Wk 7 Sacred time: American Protestant millennialism

Sacred space: The art of the "Hudson River School"

Communitarian experiments (Shakers, Perfectionists, and Mormons)

Wk 8 MIDTERM EXAM

Gender and domesticity in Victorian Protestantism

The Social Gospel and Mind Cure

Wk 9 Religion, science and Fundamentalism

The New Religious Right

DISCUSSION OF MARSDEN (3rd review due)

E. Catholicism and Judaism in America

Wk 10 Catholic foundations in Maryland

Immigration and nativism

Devotional Catholicism

Wk 11 DISCUSSION OF ORSI (4th review due)

Reform Judaism

Orthodox and Conservative Judaism

F. African American Traditions

Wk 12 The "Invisible Institution"

Rise of independent denominations

The Jim Crow era

Wk 13 The theology of Martin Luther King

New religions in the urban North

DISCUSSION OF MALCOLM X (5th review due)

G. Religion and Modern America

Wk 14 Protestant, Catholic and Jew: Toward a new synthesis?

Popular religion in the Age of Aquarius

NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Holiday

Wk 15 The great American cult scare

The current situation