

REL 295 Religion, Race, and American Evangelicalism
Grinnell College
Fall 2022



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(noon-2pm)

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This syllabus contains:

- Course description
- Objectives/outcomes
- Course policies
- Assignments and Grading

Course Texts:

Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*

Anthea Butler, *White Evangelical Racism*

Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America*

For many Americans, both scholars and faith communities alike, one of the truly confounding tasks in contemporary settings, is how to define and categorize the nature and scope of American evangelicalism. Such a task is all the more complicated when one asks, “*which*” evangelicals—a nuance tethered to demographic considerations, namely along the lines of race, sex, and even shifting theological commitments. In light of this, this course has two goals: 1) introducing students to major markers of American evangelical thought and historical development; 2) interpreting the shifts of American evangelicalism as a feature of race relations and political arrangements in the 21st century.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

1. Identify and contextualize the central theological and social commitments of evangelical Christianity.
2. Recognize the historical, political, and cultural shifts that have contributed to the adaptation(s) of evangelical thought and behavior.
3. Identify how race and racialization have been, and remain, salient features of White American evangelical identity
4. Link contemporary evangelical thought to modern political fractionalization.
5. Through assessment mechanisms (i.e. course papers and exams), students will have the opportunity to strengthen critical writing skills and the ability to synthesize information.



Academic Integrity

Because ours is a community of scholars, academic dishonesty as a serious offense. Academic dishonesty (plagiarism) is an act in which a student claims the work of another (without authorization, attribution, or citation) as his/her own. This includes and is not limited to written, oral, videotape, audiotape, photograph, or website sources. It is, in fact, a form of stealing. A student may not use a direct quote, a paraphrase of another's idea, or substantive ideas without providing credit for the source of information. Plagiarism even extends to submitting the same paper or portions of a paper previously written for two different assignments. If an instructor suspects a student of plagiarizing, the instructor may discuss concerns with the student first because often plagiarism results from carelessness. The student is then advised or reminded of strategies that safeguard against plagiarism. If the plagiarism is substantial, the instructor may fail the student, and the student may be reported to the appropriate student conduct offices as appropriate.

Student Accommodations

The College is committed to providing disability services that enable students who qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) to participate fully in the activities and courses. To receive accommodations, students must provide appropriate documentation that demonstrates a current substantially limiting disability. Accommodations are provided based on an evaluation of the information provided by students and their clinicians, on a case-by-case basis.

Additionally, student religious observance will be respected. If extensions or additional accommodations are needed, please contact me.

Students with children are more than welcome to bring them to class

Course Policies (Cont.)

Electronic Devices

Students may NOT have cell phones out during class, and are expected to silence these devices prior to the start of lecture/discussion. I will make an exception for computers, provided that they are used to take notes. If there is an emergency or a student needs to take a call during class, please step outside quietly, so as not to disturb others.

Course expectations for civility and mutual respect

Given the subject matter in the class, which will often elicit strong reactions pertaining to race and challenges to one's religious and/or secular worldview, it is imperative that all students and I, as the instructor, maintain an atmosphere of absolute respect and goodwill toward all points of view. Our course readings and conversations may prove occasionally uncomfortable, and some of the concepts and ideas may challenge your core beliefs. This is a good thing, and because you're in my class, I presume that you, in some way, desire to be challenged. As we work through the course together, please keep an open mind and embrace the challenges as useful for the process of intercultural competence and intellectual growth.

Assignments and Grading

Weekly Study Guide Worksheets

To ensure students get into the habit of critically reading and taking notes effectively, you are also required to produce and submit a 2-page "study guide" (hard copy) each Thursday in which you 1) offer a summarization of the week's reading/topic; 2) raise a few critiques/questions of interest that you find compelling or problematic, and explain why. The objective for these guides is twofold: it will cultivate skills for effective note-taking and critical reading, and it will provide a tangible template for your in-class contributions.

Midterm and Final Examinations

Course examinations will be mostly multiple choice, short answer, or essay-based, and are worth 100 points each. The mid-term will be in-class, and the final exam will be largely essay-based and take-home.

Book Review (or 3-page Film Review)

Students are to write a 5-page book review on one of the required texts and should accomplish three things: 1) clearly articulate the thesis/central argument of the work; 2) cite three main/key points that support the thesis (using evidence from the text); 3) offer a brief critical appraisal of the work (i.e. note strengths and/or weaknesses) and additional insights that may suggest something about the study of religion broadly conceived.

Grading

Weekly Study Guide notes (up to) 300 points

Mid-term 100 points

Final 100 points

5-page Book Review 100 points

Total: 600 points (*there will be opportunities for extra credit)

Course Schedule (*)indicates required readings)**

Week 1 (August 25): Course Introductions/expectations

Readings: n/a

Week 2 (Aug. 29-September 2): Religion and Race in America

Readings:

***Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, Ch. 8

***Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, “Obituary for White Christian America” and Ch. 1

Week 3 (Sept. 5-9): Religious Landscapes in American culture

Readings:

***Emerson and Smith, Ch. 1

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/04/26/in-america-does-more-education-equal-less-religion/>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/23/black-americans-are-more-likely-than-overall-public-to-be-christian-protestant/>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/14/the-factors-driving-the-growth-of-religious-nonprofits-in-the-u-s/>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/08/30/most-white-americans-who-regularly-attend-worship-services-voted-for-trump-in-2020/>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2020/03/12/white-evangelicals-see-trump-as-fighting-for-their-beliefs-though-many-have-mixed-feelings-about-his-personal-conduct/>

Week 4 (Sept. 12-16): Who are the Evangelicals?

Readings:

***Emerson and Smith, Ch. 2

Frances Fitzgerald, “The Great Awakenings and the Evangelical Empire”

Week 5 (Sept. 19-23): Who are the Evangelicals? (cont.)

Readings:

Fitzgerald, “Billy Graham and Modern Evangelicalism”

Week 6 (Sept. 26-30): Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, and the Challenge of Modernity

Readings:

Fitzgerald, “The Fundamentalist-Modernist Conflict”

Justin Farrell, “The Young and the Restless? The Liberalization of Young Evangelicals”

Week 7 (October 3-7): The Christian Right; evangelical political power

Readings:

***Emerson and Smith, Ch. 3

***Jones, Ch. 3

Fitzgerald, "The Christian Coalition and the Republican Party"

Week 8 (Oct. 10-14): Evangelicals and the Race "Problem"

Readings:

***Emerson and Smith, Ch. 4

***Anthea Butler, *White Evangelical Racism*, Introduction and Ch. 1

*****IN-CLASS MIDTERMS, OCTOBER 11TH**

Week 9 (Oct. 17-21): Fall Break; No Class

Week 10 (Oct. 24-28): Evangelicals and the Race "Problem" (cont.)

Readings:

***Emerson and Smith, Ch. 5-6

***Jones, Ch. 5

***Butler, Ch. 3

Week 11 (Oct. 31-November 4): Christian Nationalism

Film:

Jesus Camp (2007)

Readings:

Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, *Taking America Back for God*, Preface and Introduction

Joshua Davis and Samuel Perry, "White Christian Nationalism and Relative Political Tolerance for Racists"

*****GATES LECTURE Judith Weisenfeld (Nov. 2-3)**

Week 12 (Nov. 7-11) Evangelical Culture Wars: Is there a "Woke" Evangelicalism?

Readings:

***Jones, Ch. 4

Kristin Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, Introduction

Steenland and Wright, "American Evangelicals and Conservative Politics"

Week 13 (Nov. 14-18) Contemporary (Political) Iterations in the Evangelical World

Reading:

Jason Springs, "QAnon, Conspiracy, and White Evangelical Apocalypse"

<https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/theorizing-modernities/qanon-evangelical-apocalypse/>

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/february/white-evangelicals-qanon-election-conspiracy-trump-aei.html>

"Why Q Anon Has Attracted So Many White Evangelicals?"

<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-qanon-has-attracted-so-many-white-evangelicals/>

Week 14 (Nov. 21-25) Thanksgiving Break; No Class

Week 15 (Nov. 30-December 2) Where Do We Go From Here; what have we learned?

Readings:

***Butler, Ch. 4-Conclusion

***Emerson and Smith, Ch. 9

***** FIVE-PAGE BOOK REVIEWS DUE FRIDAY (DECEMBER 2ND) BY 10PM VIA BLACKBOARD**

(December 5-9) TBD* (FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE @NOON, DECEMBER 16TH VIA BLACKBOARD**

