
Women and Gender in American Religious History

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Overview

Women make up the majority in most religious communities in the United States, just as they have for centuries. But the religious histories of American women are often overlooked. Beginning with pre-Columbian Native American women and ending with debates about masculinity in modern religious and atheist movements, we will consider what it means to put gender and religion at the center of American history. We will examine the many different ways that women have contributed to diverse religious traditions in the United States, from the fifteenth century to the present day, including: Puritan goodwives and accused witches, eighteenth-century nuns and nineteenth-century Shakers, and feminist and anti-feminist theologies from suffrage to the Equal Rights Amendment. We will also analyze the importance of gender in religious representation, considering for example: depictions of Jesus as a gentle shepherd and as a burly boxer, as well as representations of Muslim women in American popular culture since 9/11.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain the major eras and events of American religious history from the fifteenth century to the present day.
- Discuss and compare diverse religious traditions within the United States, and diverse approaches to gender within those traditions.
- Analyze representations of religion and gender in historical and modern texts and images.
- Construct clear written and oral arguments about religion and gender in American history, drawing on specific examples.

Required Texts

- *The Religious History of American Women*, edited by Catherine A. Brekus

This book is available at the University bookstore, and may also be available at Half.com or other discount websites.

As indicated on this syllabus, we will also be reading several articles that are not included in this book. In order to keep costs down, all of these readings will be available on our course's Canvas site. You are responsible for downloading and reading these articles before class.

Grade Distribution

- Participation: 15%
- Reading Responses: 25%
- Paper Topic: 5%
- Annotated Biblio.: 10%
- Paper Abstract: 15%
- Final Paper: 30%

Important Dates

- PAPER TOPIC DUE: Sept. 25
- ANNOT. BIBLIO. DUE: Oct. 23
- PAPER ABSTRACT DUE: Nov. 13
- FINAL PAPER DUE: Dec. 3



HELLO.

Welcome to History 4XX! I'm glad that you've decided to take this class. Over the course of the semester, we're going to learn about American religious history with an emphasis on women and gender. We'll focus on learning about what happened during this period, and we'll think more deeply about how history gets remembered and retold.

MY ROLE is to provide you with the information that you need to succeed in this course. I have put together readings, lesson plans, and activities that I hope will be informative and engaging, and that will challenge you to think about history in new ways. It is also my responsibility to make sure that my expectations for you are clear. This syllabus attempts to do that, and I have put up more detailed instructions for specific assignments on our course Canvas site. I am here to help you. If you have any questions or concerns about the class, please reach out to me via email or schedule a meeting with me using this link: <https://calendly.com/esj312/officehours>).

YOUR ROLE is to put in the work needed to get as much out of the class that you can. I will do my best to provide you with the resources that you need, but it's still up to you to come to class, to do the readings, to take good notes, and to complete your assignments. Of course, you can decide to do as much or as little of this as you like, and your grade will tend to reflect your effort. If you are struggling in the class, please come see me right away so that I can help you with strategies to get on track.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY is to respect the others in the classroom. We will be discussing a wide range of issues in this class. Ideas about race, sexuality, religion, and politics are a key part of understanding our history. I hope that you will actively participate in discussions. Remember that our classroom is made up of 31 individuals with different viewpoints and experiences. Respectful discussion will enrich the classroom experience for everyone. Dismissive comments and ad hominem attacks (whether against another student or against a particular racial, political, or other group) will not be tolerated.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME HERE.

- Respect your classmates by using the names and pronouns that they ask you to use.
- It's ok to ask questions about pretty much anything if you ask in a respectful way (i.e. with an actual desire to learn and not to put people down).
- Everyone deserves to get as much out of this class as possible. If you need anything (like larger font on slides, transcripts for videos, a saved seat up front, flexibility with attendance, or probably a million other things I'm not thinking of), please ask!
- Ball State's Disability Services office offers additional services for students with disabilities; you can contact them at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu

Requirements:

Attendance and Participation: This is a discussion-centered course. Attendance and active participation are required not only for full credit in this course, but also to make this course as valuable as possible for everyone. Use the discussion questions included here as a guide for your reading, but also come prepared to raise your own questions, concerns, and ideas. Because of the importance of active participation in this class, 15% of your final grade will be determined by your attendance and participation.

Factors that will contribute to a higher participation grade:

- Engaging thoughtfully in small-group discussions and activities
- Contributing to large-group brainstorming and other activities
- Asking questions during class time when appropriate
- Demonstrating that you have done the reading (by being prepared to engage in discussion)
- Letting me know when you will be absent (no documentation is required)

Factors that will contribute to a lower participation grade:

- Not participating in small-group or large-group discussions
- Dominating small- and large-group discussions such that others can't participate
- Speaking or behaving disrespectfully toward your classmates or professor
- Using technology in a way that distracts you or your classmates
- Demonstrating a lack of engagement with readings or lectures
- Being absent or unprepared when pop quizzes are given
- Disruptive or frequent tardiness
- Frequent absences (even if excused)

Reading Responses: Each week, you will turn in a reading response on one of the week's readings. (You can choose each week whether you want to respond to the reading for Tuesday or Thursday). You can skip up to two reading responses without negatively affecting your grade, but you must get in touch with me to let me know when you want to use your skips. Each reading response should have two parts:

1. **Thesis Statement:** In 1–2 sentences, summarize the author's main argument. What position does the author take, or what new perspective does s/he offer? Why does s/he think this is important? Don't just summarize what the author *says*. Focus on what s/he *argues*. Be specific about what time period the author is discussing, and remember to always talk about the past in the past tense.
2. **Discussion Questions:** Based on the reading, craft **two** questions that you think will stimulate in-class discussion. These should be questions that we can answer based on the information that we have, but they should require us to dig deeper into the text or to make connections to other readings.

Reading responses must be submitted via Canvas by 11:59 PM on the day before class (Monday if you are responding to Tuesday's reading, and Wednesday if you are responding to Thursday's reading). Reading responses received after 11:59 PM will be marked late, and they will not be accepted after our class start time.

Final Paper: You will write an 8–10 page research paper on a topic of your choosing, related to any aspect of women and gender in American religious history. For this paper, you will need to consult

scholarly sources *outside of the class texts* in order to make an original and well-supported argument about your topic. This paper is worth 30% of your final grade, and is due on **December 3**. Please submit your paper **via Canvas** by 11:59 P.M. on the due date. You will also complete three smaller assignments (listed below), which are intended to help you in thinking through and writing this final paper.

Paper Topic: No later than **September 25**, you must email me with a proposed topic for your final paper. It should be broad enough that it is possible to research it, but narrow enough that you can cover the topic thoroughly within the page limit. Your topic may need to be refined, in which case I will email you and we can discuss your topic over email or in a one-on-one meeting. Once your paper topic has been approved, you will receive full credit for this assignment, which is worth 5% of your final grade.

Annotated Bibliography: On **October 23**, you will turn in a 1–2 page bibliography, listing 5 sources that you will consult in writing your paper. At least three of these must be scholarly sources (either books or journal articles by trained scholars). For each source, you will write 2–3 sentences explaining what the source is, what information it contains, and why you think it will be a good source for your paper. Please submit your bibliography **via Canvas** by 11:59 P.M. on the due date.

Paper Abstract: On **November 13**, you will turn in a 1 page abstract of your final paper. At the top of the page, please include your proposed thesis statement for the paper (it's ok if this changes as you write the paper). This should be an original argument based on your sources, and it will be the driving force of your paper. Under the thesis statement, you will write a paragraph explaining what your paper topic is (in more detail than you could in September) and why it is a significant topic worth researching. Please submit your abstract **via Canvas** by 11:59 P.M. on the due date.

More information will be given in advance of each of these assignments. Instructions and rubrics are also available on Canvas (under “Assignments”). Always feel free to get in touch if you have questions.

Grade Scale:

The grading scale for this course is as follows:

94–100%	A	87–89%	B+	77–79%	C+	67–69%	D+	Below 60%	F
90–93%	A-	84–86%	B	74–76%	C	64–66%	D		
		80–83%	B-	70–73%	C-	60–63%	D-		

Policies:

Exams: There are no exams in this class. Really.

Late Assignments: If you need more time to complete a quiz or assignment, just ask. Send me an email or contact me through Canvas. I'm happy to work with you. If you email me at the last minute and don't hear back from me before the deadline, it's generally safe to assume that you can have at least an extra 24 hours from the original deadline.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is when you take someone else's words or ideas and represent them as your own. The purpose of any assignment or quiz is for you to show me *your* knowledge and ideas. When you plagiarize, I really see what *you* know. The penalty for plagiarism ranges from a **zero** on the assignment; if it keeps happening, you may get a zero in the class. Don't risk it and always feel free to reach out if you need help!

Citing Sources: To avoid plagiarism, make sure to always cite your sources (i.e. make it clear where you're getting your information). Check out the "How to Cite Sources" page on Canvas for more information about when you need to cite sources and how to do it correctly.

Technology: Please be courteous. Silence your cell phone during class. If you receive an important call that you *must* take, please step out into the hallway to do so. Laptops and cell phones are permitted, but please use them in a way that keeps you engaged with the class (taking notes, checking readings, using the Canvas app, etc.) and not in ways that disengage you from the class (checking Facebook, email, shopping, texting, etc.). If you would like to use your laptop, please sit near the back of class or along the sides of the room to prevent your screen from distracting others.

Syllabus: You are responsible for reviewing this syllabus and abiding by the policies and schedule stated here. I reserve the right to make minor revisions to this syllabus during the semester, but I will always let you know (via email) if changes are made. The most up-to-date syllabus will always be posted on Canvas.

Resources:

Communication: Email is the best way to reach me if you have questions or concerns or need to schedule an appointment. You can expect a reply from me within 24 hours on weekdays and within 48 hours on weekends. I will occasionally send out announcements via email (to your utk.edu email address). It is your responsibility to check this email account regularly.

Individual Meetings: My office hours are listed on the front page of the syllabus, but I'm always willing to schedule a meeting at another time if these times don't work for you. I'm happy to talk about your ideas about the readings, lectures, or your papers, to suggest additional readings or topics you might be interested in, or to chat about other class-related topics. Even if you don't have a burning question, I encourage you to get in touch.

Writing Center: The UTK Writing Center is an excellent resource for getting feedback on your drafts. Tutors can offer you one-on-one help to strengthen your arguments and improve your writing. You can also call their Grammar Hotline at 865-974-2611 for brief questions about writing. See more details at: writingcenter.utk.edu

Student Success Center: Your success is important to me, and to the University. The Student Success Center can help you to reach your academic goals by providing academic coaching, tutoring, study groups, and other resources. Find out more at: studentsuccess.utk.edu

Disability Office: If you have a physical or mental disability and require accommodation, please let me know, and get in touch with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) on campus for further assistance. ODS can help you set up special accommodations for exams, or to request help with note-taking, interpretation, etc. Please get in touch with ODS as soon as possible if you require accommodations; I may not be able to make special arrangements if you request them right before an exam or assignment due date. You can find them at: ods.utk.edu

Week 1: Welcome!

AUGUST 21

August 21: Welcome!

Today we'll introduce ourselves, go over the syllabus, and discuss the broad themes of the course.

Week 2: Introducing Women, Gender, and U.S. Religious History

AUGUST 26 & 28

August 26: Studying Women in U.S. Religious History

Reading: Catherine Brekus, "Introduction: Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History," in *The Religious History of American Women*, pp. 1–50.

August 28: Studying Gender in U.S. Religious History

Reading: Amy DeRogatis, "Gender," from *Themes in Religion and American Culture*, eds. Philip Goff and Paul Harvey, pp. 197–226. (Canvas)

Questions for Discussion: What does Brekus say about why women have been ignored in American religious history? Why does she say that they should be included in these histories? How does studying women and gender add to what we can know about American religious history? How does attention to religious history add to what we can know about the histories of women and gender? What is the difference between studying "women" and studying "gender"? Why does this difference matter?

Week 3: Colonial Encounters in Early America

SEPTEMBER 2 & 4

September 2: Pre-Colonial American Religion

Reading: Mónica Díaz, "Native American Women and Religion in the American Colonies: Textual and Visual Traces of an Imagined Community," *Legacy* 28, no. 2 (2011): 205–231. (Canvas)

September 4: Gender, Race, and Catholic Identities in Early America

Reading: Emily Clark, "Hail Mary Down by the Riverside: Black and White Catholic Women in Early America," in *The Religious History of American Women*, 91–108.

Questions for Discussion: What are some of the challenges in writing about the religious histories of women? What sources can historians use to recover these histories? What is intersectionality and how does it enrich our study of American women's religious history?

Week 4: Puritans and Witches in Colonial New England

SEPTEMBER 9 & 11

September 9: Gender and Sexuality Among the Puritans

Reading: Marilyn J. Westerkamp, "Puritan Women, Spiritual Power, and the Question of Sexuality," in *The Religious History of American Women*, pp. 51–72.

September 11: Women, Gender, and Accusations of Witchcraft

Reading: Elizabeth Reis, "Revelation, Witchcraft, and the Danger of Knowing God's Secrets," in *The Religious History of American Women*, pp. 73–91.

Questions for Discussion: What roles did Puritan theology offer to women? How were Puritan women's opportunities shaped, expanded, and limited by their religious communities? What role did theologies of gender play in the witch trials? Westerkamp and Reis tell two very different stories about Puritan women; how do you make sense of these histories alongside one another?

Week 5: Women, Revivals, and New Religious Movements

SEPTEMBER 16 & 18

September 16: Women and Gender in the First and Second Great Awakenings

Reading: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Women and Religious Revivals: Anti-Ritualism, Liminality, and the Emergence of the American Bourgeoisie,” from *The Evangelical Tradition in America*, ed. Leonard Sweet, pp. 199-231. (Canvas)

September 18: Gender, Sexuality, and New Religious Movements in the Nineteenth Century

Reading: Susan Hall Lindley, “Alternative Religions in Nineteenth-Century America,” from *You Have Stept Out of Your Place*, pp. 252–274. (Canvas)

Questions for Discussion: In what ways did the Great Awakenings expand religious women’s roles and in what ways did they not? How and why did these experiences vary between different religious movements? Why were women drawn to evangelical revivals and to new religious movements? How did women’s experiences of these revivals and groups vary across lines of class, race, and region?

Week 6: Religion and Reform in the Nineteenth Century

SEPTEMBER 23 & 25

September 23: Religious and Anti-Religious Currents in First-Wave Feminism

Reading: Kathi Kern, “Introduction,” from *Mrs. Stanton’s Bible*, pp. 1–13. (Canvas)
Ann Braude, “Thine for Agitation,” from *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, pp. 56–81. (Canvas)

September 25: Nineteenth-Century Reform and the Power of African-American Churches

Reading: Anthea D. Butler, “Unrespectable Saints: Women of the Church of God in Christ,” in *The Religious History of American Women*, pp. 161–183.

Questions for Discussion: Was nineteenth-century feminism predominately religious or predominately anti-religious? What influenced each strand of thought, and what cultural contexts shaped their relative influence? How did Protestant feminists react to Stanton’s critiques of religion and to women Spiritualists? How were these reactions similar and how were they different? Were the women that Butler describes feminists? Why or why not?

Paper Topic Due by 11:59 P.M. on Thursday, September 25

(Email me with your idea for paper topic by this date)

Week 7: Immigration, Urbanization, and Religion, 1880s–1920s

SEPTEMBER 30 & OCTOBER 2

September 30: Catholic Women in the New America

Reading: Robert Orsi, “The Domus-Centered Society,” from *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem*, pp. 75–106. (Canvas)

October 2: Jewish Women in the New America

Reading: Paula Hyman, “The Jewish Body Politic: Gendered Politics in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies and Gender Issues* 2 (Spring 5759/1999), pp. 37–51. (Canvas)

Questions for Discussion: How did religion, ethnicity, and gender intersect in the lives of Catholic women and Jewish women in the early twentieth century? How were these women’s experiences similar and how were they different? To what extent were religious and ethnic identity separate for these women and to what extent were they inseparable? Has that changed as broader American attitudes toward Catholicism and Judaism have shifted?

Week 8: Women, Men, and Gender Performance in Pentecostal Revivalism

OCTOBER 7 & 9

October 7: Gender, Evangelicalism and Sister Aimee

Reading: Matthew A. Sutton, “Between the Refrigerator and the Wildfire’: Aimee Semple McPherson and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy,” *Church History* 72, no. 1 (March 2003): pp.159–188. (Canvas)

October 9: Manliness, Whiteness, and Muscular Christianity

Reading: Stephen Prothero, “Manly Redeemer,” from *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, pp. 87–124. (Canvas)

Questions for Discussion: How do these perspectives on early-twentieth-century religious and reform movements diverge from what we’ve read over the past two weeks? How would you put Prothero and Sutton into conversation with Kern, Butler, Orsi, and Hyman? How do Prothero’s sources and his way of telling history differ from the other articles we’ve been reading? What do cultural histories like this add to our ways of understanding history?

There will be no class on October 14 or October 16. Happy Fall Break!

Week 9: Feminist and Anti-Feminist Currents in Late Twentieth-Century Christianity

OCTOBER 21 & 23

October 21: Feminist and Womanist Theologies

Reading: Ann Braude, “Faith, Feminism, and History,” in *The Religious History of American Women*, pp. 232–252.

Patricia-Anne Johnson, “Womanist Theology as Counter-Narrative,” from *Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion: Views from the Other Side*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether, pp. 197–214. (Canvas)

October 23: Women, Gender and the Rise of the New Christian Right

Reading: R. Marie Griffith, “Submissive Wives, Wounded Daughters, and Female Soldiers: Prayer and Christian Womanhood in the Women’s Aglow Fellowship,” from *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall, pp. 160–195. (Canvas)

Questions for Discussion: Why and how have religious women been excluded from our narratives about modern feminism? How and why have some religious women rejected association with the feminist movement? How do womanist critiques of feminism differ from conservative evangelical critiques of the movement? What attracts some women to feminism, others to womanism, and others to conservative gender ideologies?

Annotated Bibliography Due by 11:59 P.M. on Thursday, October 23 via Canvas

Week 10: Women and Devotion in New Immigrant Communities

OCTOBER 28 & 30

October 28: Immigration and Changing Religious Communities in the United States

Reading: Elizabeth McAlister, “The Madonna of 115th Street Revisited: Voudou and Haitian Catholicism in the Age of Transnationalism,” from *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*, eds. R. Stephen Warner, Judith G. Vittner, pp. 123–162. (Canvas)

October 30: Immigration and Changing Religious Devotion Among Immigrants

Reading: Kristy Nabhan-Warren, “Little Slices of Heaven and Mary’s Candy Kisses: Mexican American Women Redefining Feminism and Catholicism,” in *The Religious History of American Women*, pp. 294–318.

Questions for Discussion: Think back to our discussion of women, religion, and immigration in the early twentieth century. How did the women that we looked at in Week 7 draw on religious and ethnic identification to make sense of their place in the United States? How did their experiences differ from the women in our readings this week, and how are they similar? How have ideas about gender, immigration, and Catholicism changed, and how have they stayed the same?

Paper Abstract Due by 11:59 P.M. on Thursday, November 13 via Canvas

Week 11: Religion and Activism in Chicana and Indigenous Communities

NOVEMBER 4 & 6

November 4: Spirituality, Activism, Scholarship

Reading: Irene Lara and Elise Facio, “Introduction: Fleshing the Spirit, Spiriting the Flesh,” in *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives*, eds. Elisa Facio and Irene Lara (University of Arizona Press, 2014), 3–18.

November 6: Family, Identity, Community

Reading: Michelle Téllez, “‘Pero tu no crees en dios’: Negotiating Spirituality. Family and Community,” in *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives*, eds. Elisa Facio and Irene Lara (University of Arizona Press, 2014), 150–157.

Week 12: American Muslim Women at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century

NOVEMBER 11 & 13

November 11: “Persistent Stereotypes”

Reading: Ch. 2 of Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, Kathleen M. Moore, *Muslim Women in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 21–40. (Canvas)

November 13: “Embracing Islam”

Reading: Ch. 3 of Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, Kathleen M. Moore, *Muslim Women in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 21–40. (Canvas)

Questions for Discussion: How are Muslim women represented in American culture? Do you think this has changed since this book was written? How do Muslim women define their own religious beliefs and practices? How do these readings compare to the experiences of other religious minorities in American history?

Week 13: Religion, Irreligion, and Masculinity in the 1990s–2000s

NOVEMBER 18 & 20

November 18:

Reading: Rhys H. Williams, “Promise Keepers: A Comment on Religion and Social Movements,” in *Sociology of Religion* 61, no 1 (2000), pp. 1–10. (Canvas)

November 20:

Reading: Victoria Bekiempis, “New Atheism and the Old Boys’ Club,” in *Bitch Magazine* (2011). Available at: <http://bitchmagazine.org/article/the-unbelievers> or on Canvas.

Questions for Discussion: How do the Promise Keepers talk about the relationship between religion and gender, especially masculinity? What does Bekiempis say about the role that gender and masculinity play in the New Atheist movement? Is it appropriate to compare

these movements? Why or why not? How are these accounts of masculinity and (ir)religion similar to the cases that we looked at from the early twentieth century? How are they different?

There will be no class on November 25 or November 27. Happy Thanksgiving!

Week 15: Wrapping Up

DECEMBER 2

Wrap Up and Review: bring all of your burning questions, comments, ideas, and suggestions. This class session will act as an opportunity to talk about all of the themes of the course together one final time. Come prepared!

Questions for Discussion: We'll revisit the questions we asked at the beginning of the course. How can studying religion enrich our understandings of women's and gender history, and how can studying women and gender enrich our understandings of religious history? What does it mean to put religion and gender at the center of American history? How has this course addressed some of the concerns raised in the readings by Brekus, De Rogatis, and Braude? What still needs to be done?

Final Paper Due by 11:59 P.M. on Wednesday, December 3 via Canvas