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FALL 2018/ACE 8
RELG 227/HIST 227
**AMERICAN
PROPHETS**
Religion & Politics
in America

Wednesday 2-4:30 pm
Max Perry Mueller
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Professor Max Perry Mueller (max.mueller@unl.edu (<mailto:max.mueller@unl.edu>))

Class Meets: Wednesday 2-4:30 pm in Burnett Hall 126

Office Hours: 2-4pm Mondays (email for an appointment).

Course Description:

This course examines the development of the category of the “prophet” in American history and culture, especially the prophetic category that has arisen to address “sins” committed by the American state and/or people. We will examine “prophets” from multiple communities, including African Americans, Native Americans, social justice advocates, anti-poverty movements, as well as religious minority communities who have been the victims of persecution and suspicion. We focus mostly on examining the category of prophet in regards to the relationship between religion and the broader society—especially as these prophets have defined “sins” (e.g. slavery, racism, Indian removal, poverty, religious persecution, among others) as when: the experience of Americans have not matched up with the promises of the American democratic and pluralistic experiment to guarantee all people “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” and “equality before the law.” We will also examine the primary rhetorical style by which prophets have called out—and called America to account for—these sins: the jeremiad tradition.

A prefatory note on class approach: you will see from the first moment of the course that this is a “[flipped classroom](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/flipping-the-classroom/) (https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/flipping-the-classroom/).” The classroom is flipped for both philosophical reasons (and emerging best teaching practices) as well as practical ones (my family is expecting the arrival of our second child in mid-September).

For us, a flipped classroom means primarily that you will do most “lower level” cognitive work (gaining knowledge and comprehension) outside of class and on your own—or preferably in smaller intellectual communities (“study groups”). Class time will be focused on the higher forms of cognitive work (application, analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation), during which you will have the support of your peers and instructor. This model contrasts from the traditional model in which “first exposure” occurs via lecture in class, with students assimilating knowledge through homework; thus the term “flipped classroom.”

A flipped classroom is particularly well suited for our course, which deals with thinking through different ethical challenges that the American nation has created and faced.

I. OUTCOMES

(Required ACE verbage)

ACE 8

This course is designed to address Learning Outcome 8 of the Achievement Centered Education program:

Use knowledge, theories, and analysis to explain ethical principles and their importance in society.

This course satisfies ACE 8 (and, hopefully does much more) by developing in students the following OUTCOMES: (In other words, what you will be required to do in this class to demonstrate achievement of outcomes):

1. Use "close reading" skills to analyze and evaluate primary and secondary sources (texts and other historical/cultural content).
2. Write and create media (text and other media) in which they analyze course readings and outside materials through different ethical, religious, and/or moral perspectives drawn from the historical cases we study.
3. Identify and describe the impact of diverse religious traditions on culture, politics, economics, etc., in American history.
4. Demonstrate respect for religiously diverse peoples, spaces, and objects.

II. OUTPUTS (In other words, what you, the students, will do in order to develop and demonstrate outcomes):

1. Read assigned course readings (see required texts and course map below).
2. Read and discuss the week's news (via the *New York Times*).
3. Prepare weekly "**reading with purpose**" exercises.
4. Prepare and present "close reading" presentation.
5. Complete protocol.
6. Complete two response papers.
7. Complete final project.
8. Participate in the class's "temporary community" (e.g. study with community members; prepare "close reading" presentation collaboratively; visit professor and other community members in office hours; say hi to community members when you encounter them on the streets, in the dining halls, etc.).

III. OBJECTIVES (In other words, what I, the professor, will do in order to facilitate your outputs and outcomes):

1. Select course readings.
2. (Informally) lecture on readings and related historical context.
3. Guide classroom discussions.
4. Mentor and guide writing assignments and final projects.
5. Chit, chat, lament, harangue, laugh (cry!) in office hours etc. with other community members.
6. Grade assignments.

Required Texts:

(Starita) Joe Starita, *I Am a Man: Chief Standing Bear's Journey for Justice* (2010)

(Walker) David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal* (1995).

(Day) Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (2009).

(X) Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1987).

(Coates) *Between the World and Me* (2015).

(CR) indicates other readings drawn from our course reader. PLEASE **download** and preferably print your course reader so you can interact with it with pen/pencil and paper. And bring it to class. (If you cannot afford to print the CR, please let me know and I will arrange to print it for you). Find the CR **here**.

(NYT) ALWAYS BRING YOUR COPY OF THE *New York Times* to class (preferably the edition for our class day).

Course requirements and evaluations

1. **Two response papers (700 words) 10% each = 20%**

You will write two response papers (700 words, double-spaced), in which you:

1. Identify the prophet who we have studied (provide personal biographical information and historical context).
2. Identify and explain the "sin" that the prophet we have studied responds to.
3. Explain how the prophet responds to this sin (e.g. what the punishment should be/what the penance should be etc.).
4. Explain how another prophet we have studied would respond to this sin.
5. Reflect on your own experiences or views on the "sin" that this prophet identifies by noting commonalities and differences between your own experiences and views and that of the prophet.

Each paper should quote directly from the text(s). Criteria for evaluation will include *creativity*, clarity of thought, organization, and expression (see "[Guide to Writing in Our Course](#)").

2. One protocol 10%

Each week, one or more students will be responsible for writing a "protocol"—akin to class meeting notes but with your own analysis added in. The protocols are due (posted in Canvas before the start of class), copied, distributed, and read in class. These protocols are intended to synthesize our work and integrate the course from week to week. *When it is not your week, please also take your own notes. Here is a sample [protocol](#)*

3. One close reading presentation 10%

Based on Patricia Kain's canonical "[How to Do Close Reading \(https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading\)](https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading)," with a partner, each student will lead a 30-minute session in which you first verbally "walk" the class through how you closely read a text from our course. Then you will facilitate a discussion in which the whole class looks at alternative readings and/or contextualization of this reading in other course materials. The Monday before your Wednesday presentation, you will inform the class of your choice of text. The length of the text should be the equivalent to one poem or one page of prose. Do not try to sum up/analyze the entire reading.

All close reading presentations must contain:

1. An introduction of the text itself, including a biography of the author(s)/creators.
2. A visual aide (electronic or tangible) to help guide the presentation.
3. A detailed analysis of syntax, diction, literary style etc. (i.e. the close reading).
4. A detailed analysis of the sin and response to it presented in the text. (1). Identity and explain the "sin" that the prophet we have studied responds to 2). Explain how the prophet responds to this sin (e.g. what the punishment should be/what the penance should be etc.) 3). Explain how another prophet we have studied would respond to this sin.)
5. Three questions that can springboard further discussion of the text.

Bonus points (up to 2 points (out of the course's 100—so yeah, that's significant—) offered to students who make significant additions/edits to Wikipedia pages related to the author of your close reading or the close reading itself.

5. Final Project 40%

In consultation with the instructor, you will identify another prophet or prophetic movement that responds to a "sin" committed by the American people and/or state. You will find a text(s) (the text can be written, visual (fine arts), and/or performing arts) that the prophet created. Reminder: The "sin" is in the eye of the beholder (the beholder being the prophet in our context. You might not agree with that the "sin" that the prophet identifies is a sin. Your assignment is to understand the sin, and the worldview that beholds it, from the prophet's perspective.

Possibilities include: environmental degradation; Islamophobia; LGBTQ discrimination (as well, yes, LGBTQ rights—think of the Westboro Baptists here); gun violence; war on drugs; war on terror; Japanese internment; mass incarceration; degradation of "traditional family"; torture; human trafficking.

Again, you need not agree that what the prophet(s) you choose to study sees as a "sin" is a sin. Your goal is to understand the prophet's perspective and think through the various ways he/she proposes to respond to it, as well as alternatives.

1. You will annotate this text using Genius.com (10%).
2. You will annotate at least one other text that relates to this sin using Genius.com (10%).
3. You will create a multi-media (digital humanities) project that tells the story of the sin and the (at least) two responses to it. We will discuss the various formats this final presentation can take as we move through the term (20%).

Attendance, preparation for class, participation 20%

Attendance=Come to class. Preparation=Read the readings "with purpose" (see our "[Reading With Purpose](#)" guide). Participation=Offer your thoughts AND listen to others. *You will evaluate your own participation twice during the term and I take your self-evaluations very seriously when calculating your grade (See sample "self evaluation" here).*

Always bring your copy of the New York Times to class! (You've already paid for your subscription via the [College Readership Program \(https://asun.unl.edu/newspaper-readership-program\)](https://asun.unl.edu/newspaper-readership-program)).

≥ 97.5	A+
≥ 92.5	A
≥ 90.0	A-
≥ 87.5	B+
≥ 82.5	B
≥ 80.0	B-

≥ 77.5	C+
≥ 72.5	C
≥ 70.0	C-
≥ 67.5	D+
≥ 62.5	D
≥ 60.0	D-
< 60.0	F

Some notes on course policies:

Computer/cellphone policy. Almost all of us are addicted to our technology. Such addiction hurts our ability to learn. (A [recent study](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1045&context=dberspeakers) (<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1045&context=dberspeakers>) showed that students who had their laptops open during a lecture class scored 10 points (out of 100) fewer on exams than those who did not use laptops. [Another study](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1045&context=dberspeakers) (<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1045&context=dberspeakers>), showed that students who texted during class scored a half a grade (.e.g. B to B-) lower in a course).

The second class meeting we will discuss how collectively increase attentiveness while also not creating anxiety by being draconian about eliminating technology use.

Consistent lateness or absence (more than 1 unexcused) will affect your participation and final grades (unless documentation for an accommodation is provided). **Every absence beyond the single unexcused absence will result in one point off final grade.** Please always bring assigned readings to class.

Canvas: This class will make regular use of the Internet resources provided via Canvas. In this way additional reading material will be made available, and important information disseminated to the students. It is therefore important that you familiarize yourself with Canvas and make sure that the email address listed with Canvas is correct. Failure to carry out these responsibilities may put you in situations that will hurt your grade.

Academic Misconduct: Any instance of academic misconduct (cheating, plagiarism, lying about reasons for missing class, etc.) are grounds for failure. If such behavior is established, a final course grade of F may be assigned and notice of this action sent to the Judicial Officer. For more information on academic misconduct, see the Student Code of Conduct at <http://stuafs.unl.edu/dos/code> (<http://stuafs.unl.edu/dos/code>).

Students with Documented Disabilities: Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

Classroom climate: Safe, but not comfortable, where we make the familiar strange and the strange familiar.

This class deals with subjects that are sensitive and emotionally charged. In order to have discussions that are productive, challenging, and thoughtful, we must respect the diversity of views that people might have on issues of religion, politics, gender, and race and make the classroom a safe space (yes, I use that phrase) in which to share and critique others' ideas. At the same time, this is not simply a space to share beliefs uncritically. We will push our colleagues to explain their reasoning, examine their assumptions, and think about topics in ways that might be, in some cases, difficult and uncomfortable—especially for those of us who may have very strong personal beliefs or opinions on these matters. Above all, classroom discussions should be constructive and never dismissive, derogatory, or involve personal or ad hominem attacks. If, at any point in time, you feel as if the classroom climate is not welcoming or supportive, I strongly encourage you to come speak with me so that we can address any problems as they arise.

Course Plan

Each class will include (usually in this order):

1. Reading and discussion of protocol.
2. Discussion of news (via NYT), with focus on ethical issues raised in the news.
3. Discussion of that week's assigned reading (often facilitated by close reading presenters) and based on "reading with purpose" rubric.

(Break).

4. Lecture/exercise/discussion led by the professor.

August 22

Taboo: Religion and Politics

Introductions and class procedures

By Sunday, August 26, DUE 10 pm in Canvas ([find further instructions here](#)). Read and respond to this article: Wen Stephenson, "American Jeremiad: A Manifesto" (2010) (CR)

August 29

Is America a "City on a Hill?"

[Cody Fischer] Protocol #1

Jonathan Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (1629/30) (CR)

Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741) (CR)

September 5

Is slavery salvific providence or America's Original Sin? (Or Both?)

[Amanda B] Protocol #2

[Pricilla and Avian] Close Reading Presentation #1

Phillis Wheatley, Poems (Read introductory materials and "To the University" and "On Being Brought") (CR)

Kendrick Lamar, *Damn* (Focus on "DNA," "YAH," FEAR, "Humble") (Use Genius.com to analyze the songs).

September 12

TBA

Response Paper #1 due at 11:59 pm in Canvas on Sunday, September 16

September 19

Can you be "Indian" and "American?"

[Mikie Brown] Protocol #3

[Tessa and Nora] Close Reading Presentation #2

Andrew Jackson, "On Indian Removal" (1830) (CR)

(Starita), *I Am a Man: Chief Standing Bear's Journey for Justice*

September 26

Can you be a "Christian" and a slave master?

[Avian Tate] Protocol #4

[Cody and Hayley] Close Reading Presentation #3

(Walker) David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal*

October 3

Can you be "a Negro" and an American?

Can you be a Woman and an American?

[Leila] Protocol #5

[Zach and Mikie] Close Reading Presentation #4

George D. Armstrong, "Christian Doctrine of Slavery" (1857) (CR)

Frederick Douglass, On "Evangelical" Flogging (1847) (CR)

Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of July 4th for the Negro" (1852) (CR)

Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" (1851) (CR)

October 10

Can you be a Mormon (or Muslim) and American?

[Nora] Protocol #6

[Ryan and Reagan] Close Reading Presentation #5

Joseph Smith, "General Smith's Views of the Powers and Policies of the Government of the United States" (1844) (CR)

Republican Presidential Platform of 1856 (CR)

Aymann Ismail and Jeffrey Bloomer, "Who's Afraid of Ayman Ismail?" Read introduction [here](#)

http://www.slate.com/articles/video/whos_afraid_of_aymann_ismail/2017/06/aymann_ismail_s_muslim_series_confronts_who_s_afraid_of_islam_in_america.html)

and watch the following episodes: season 1, episodes, 1, 2, 3, 5

October 17

Is (access to) abortion murder or a right?

[Hayley] Protocol #7

[McKenzie and Kaitlan] Close Reading Presentation #6

Mara Willard, "Can There Be a Religious Response to Planned Parenthood's Critics?" (2012) (CR)

Margaret Sanger, "The Morality of Birth Control" (1921) (CR)

Phyllis Schlafly, "[Abortion and the GOP \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj1f3wwhBF4\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj1f3wwhBF4)." (1994) (Watch online)

October 24

Is capital punishment moral?

[Ryan] Protocol #8

[Tanner and Amanda] Close Reading Presentation #7

Watch: [Dead Man Walking \(1995\)](#) (stream on Canvas or via other means)

Response Paper #2 due at 11:59 pm in Canvas on Sunday, October 28

October 31

Can there be justice and poverty, too?

[Kaitlan] Protocol #9

[Olivia and Leila] Close Reading Presentation #8

(Day), *The Long Loneliness*

November 7

Can war be "good?"

[Zach, Priscilla] Protocol #10

[] Close Reading Presentation #9 [if necessary]

Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist" (1940) (CR)

J. Muste, "War Is The Enemy" (1942) (CR)

Plan Final Project

November 14

Can a Black Man be a part of (White) America?

[Mckenzie] Protocol #11

The Autobiography of Malcolm X (Selections)

November 28

Can you "struggle" but not "Dream?"

[Reagan] Protocol #12

Coates, *Between the World and Me*

December 5

[Olivia] Protocol #13

Final Project Work

December 10

Launch of Final Projects

Course Summary:

Date	Details
	Close Reading Presentation (https://canvas.unl.edu/courses/49622/assignments/346470)
	Final project (https://canvas.unl.edu/courses/49622/assignments/377130)
	NYT discussion board (https://canvas.unl.edu/courses/49622/assignments/339621)
	Participation (https://canvas.unl.edu/courses/49622/assignments/385608)
	Protocol (https://canvas.unl.edu/courses/49622/assignments/339198)
	Reflection paper #1 (https://canvas.unl.edu/courses/49622/assignments/341016)
	Reflection paper #2 (https://canvas.unl.edu/courses/49622/assignments/360354)

Reading with purpose

Preface:

I'm going to cut to the chase: most of you don't know how to read. That is, most of you don't know how to read "with a purpose." This means that when your college professor assigns you lots of reading, you take on one of three approaches (and sometimes more than one at the same time) 1). You attempt to read every word, but don't know why you do so 2). You skim (what I call "performative reading," which means you perform the act of reading so you can tell yourself and your professor that you "did it") 3). You ignore the reading altogether.

I advocate a fourth approach: "reading with purpose." You approach each reading assignment with specific goals in mind—a purpose—and read accordingly. If you "read with a purpose" for each reading each week, you will be prepared to participate in a lively and productive class discussion AND you will create an easy reference bank for our quizzes and exams. And, guess what? You'll get the most out of this class.

Instructions:

For our class, here is our "reading with purpose," rubric. Answer these questions by

- Explaining the ideas presented (noting page number for future reference) in your own words
- Noting when ideas remind you of other ideas in other readings OR from lecture

I. General questions:

1. Who is the author?

2. What is the context of this piece?

If this is a "primary source," what is the historical context of this reading? If this is a "secondary source," what is the scholar's/writer's field of expertise?

3. Why is this piece written? (In other words, what is the debate that the author is addressing? Who is she/he addressing?)

II. American Prophets Questions

According to the author and/or subjects of the piece:

1. Identify and explain the "sin" that the prophet we have studied responds to.
2. Explain how the prophet responds to this sin (e.g. what the punishment should be/what the penance should be etc.)
3. Explain how another prophet we have studied would respond to this sin.

NOTE: Often these questions are analytical frames that we will use/impose upon these readings to study them. In other words, concepts of "sin," "prophet," etc., will not always be found in the readings. It's up to you to figure out how to apply these frames to better understand the readings individually and comparatively.