Instructor: Matthew Dillon
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MWF 12:00 – 12:50 pm
HUM 118
Office hours: TBD

Religion 300
Religions in America

“He that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion.” ~ Jonathan Edwards

“Have we not come to such an impasse in the modern world that we must love our enemies - or else? The chain reaction of evil - hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars - must be broken, or else we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.” ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Those who tell you that to be spiritual is not to be physical do not understand the great physical-spiritual nature of your being. They have not dreamed in their minds. They have not sparkled in themselves like stars and so experiencing night they think that existence is dark.” ~ Jane Roberts

Course Description
A historical survey course on the religions and religious practices of America from colonial encounter with native peoples to the contemporary period, with a special focus on the morphing natures and historical complexities of American Christianities, religious pluralism and secularism.

Course Goals
• Provide a survey treatment of major communities, thinkers and themes in American religious history from the colonial era to the present.
• Expose students to an abundant selection of primary sources from authors and individuals significant to the development of religion in America.
• Critically explore the impact of social, political, and economic factors on the development of religiosity within America. Such factors include: religious pluralism, freedom of religion, secularization, disenchantment, civil rights, and capitalism.
• Introduce a variety of methods utilized in the study of American religion: cultural history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, comparison, textual criticism and critical theory.

Course Materials
Peter Williams, America’s Religions: From their Origins to the 21st Century (4th Ed.)

All remaining readings are either available online or will be uploaded as pdfs.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

I. Assignments
The student is expected to come to class with the reading assigned for the day completed and ready to be discussed. **Class participation** is a significant part of the grade. In order to ensure the reading has been completed and engaged, **ten pop quizzes** will be given randomly over the course of the semester. In addition, there will be a **midterm exam** on authors and texts read and discussed up to the date of the exam. Lastly, a **final paper of 10-15 pages** is required on a topic of the student’s choosing relevant to the course.

**II. Grading:**

- Pop Quizzes: 20%
- Participation: 10%
- Midterm: 30%
- Final paper (10-15 pages): 40%
- Extra credit: up to 5 points

Grading Scale (%)

- 98+ (A+)
- 97.9-94 (A)
- 93.9-90 (A-)
- 89.9-87 (B+)
- 86.9-84 (B)
- 83.9-80 (B-)
- 79.9-77 (C+)
- 76.9-74 (C)
- 73.9-70 (C-)
- 69.9-67 (D+)
- 66.9-64 (D)
- 63.9-60 (D-)
- 59.9-(F)

**III. Attendance and Absences:**

According Rice University policy, “Students are expected to attend all scheduled activities for all of the classes for which they are registered during the entire course of the academic semester for which they are enrolled.” Instructors can make exceptions based upon the following: a) a university-sponsored event conflicts with the scheduled class. If that is the case, please notify me as far in advance as possible; b) absences for activities that are not university-related may be negotiated with the Instructor on a case-by-case basis. Please notify me as far in advance as possible; c) in the case of illness, please notify me of your inability to attend the day’s class in advance. If the student will miss more than two classes for an illness, please secure a note from a medical physician.

**IV. Deadlines and Late Work**

“No student should be given an extension of time or opportunities to improve a grade that are not available to all members of the class, except for verified illness or justified absence from campus.” See Rice University guidelines here: [http://professor.rice.edu/professor/grading_guidelines1.asp](http://professor.rice.edu/professor/grading_guidelines1.asp)

To verify illness or justify another absence (primarily due to medical or family emergency), please send me an email in advance if possible. If not, please send the email as soon as possible thereafter. Extensions will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Otherwise all deadlines in this course are final. Late work will not be accepted.

**V. Policy on Electronic Devices**

It is highly recommend that students avoid the use of electronic equipment, but I will not prohibit its use. Many of the texts we will read this semester are available in electronic formats. I also understand many young students have taken notes on their laptop since childhood and cannot imagine doing so by another method. As such, electronic equipment will be allowed **unless** it becomes apparent it is being used to distract the student and those around them. Please note that research by neurologists and cognitive-scientists has proven the old-fashioned pen-and-paper strategy of notation produces higher levels of retention, comprehension, and
understanding. See for example: http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/news/releases/take-notes-by-hand-for-better-long-term-comprehension.html. The reason is quite simple: these devices are engineered to be distracting! Entire libraries of books, images, websites, videos, and games are at our fingertips waiting to be clicked.

VI. What to bring to class
To facilitate and ground our discussion of the reading, please bring all of the texts for the day to class. Electronic editions are permitted.

VII. Class preparation
The discussion of every class meeting will center on the assigned text(s) and reading-response questions. As such, it is imperative that both the reading and response have been completed prior to class. When everyone is prepared, seminars can become dynamic, intellectually ambitious forums for discussion. Each student benefits by sharing his or her insights, queries, and concerns with others, and hearing alike in turn.

VIII. Honor code
The Rice University Honor Code is available here: http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/. All students are required to abide by its honor system and by-laws. In this class, those sections of the Honor Code referencing writing, plagiarism, citation, and paraphrasing are most pertinent. Given this is course intends to train students in practices of paraphrase, citation, and scholarly attribution, I will take an educational approach to such matters. That means I will take transgressions of these procedures as an opportunity for teaching and correction, rather than as instances of academic dishonesty. However, instances of repeat or egregious transgressions can and will be brought to the attention of the Rice Honor Council.

All writing you produce in this course must be your own. No collaboration on writing is permitted. Collaborations in reading, textual discussion, critiquing other students’ writing, or revisions are strongly encouraged.

IX. ADA statement
If you have a documented disability and will be seeking academic adjustments or accommodations, please let me know during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center. See https://dss.rice.edu/

X. Syllabus Agreement
I reserve the right to change any of the reading assignments or the ordering of the readings. The assignments, policies, course goals, and grading, however, will not change.

Schedule
Jan 9: Distribution of syllabus. Mapping the terrain.

Jan 11: Watch film “Kumare.”

Jan 16: **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, NO CLASS MEETING.**

*Native American Religions*


*Protestant Christianities*

Jan 20: The Protestant Reformation and the Puritans. Read chapters 10 and 13 in WAR in addition to “The Devil in New England” and “What Must I Do to Be Saved?” by Cotton Mather.

Jan 23: Colonial Revivals and early Methodism. Read chapters 16 and 17 in Williams’ *America’s Religions* (hereafter WAR) and “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” from Jonathan Edwards (owlspace).


Jan 30: Liberal Christianity and the Social Gospel. Read chapters 18 and 32 in WAR, as well as selections from Walter Rauschenbusch’s *Theology of the Social Gospel* (owlspace).

Feb 1: The Holiness and Pentecostal Movements. Read chapters 34, 35 and 44 in WAR.

*New Christianities and Transgression*

Feb 3: Mormonism. Read “Mormonism” in NRM.

Feb 6: Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Read selections from Ellen Harmon White’s *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (owlspace).

Feb 8: The Branch Davidians. Watch “Waco: A New Revelation” on youtube and read “The Branch Davidians” in NRM.

Feb 10: **Mid-winter break. No class meeting.**

Feb 13: Watch film (youtube) “Life and Times of the People’s Temple.”

*African-American Religions*

Feb 17: Introducing African-American Religions. Read chapters 2 and 27 in WAR.

Feb 20: Civil Rights, Social Justice and the Black Church. Read chapters 40 and 51 in WAR. Watch Martin Luther King Jr.’s “The Other America” (youtube).


Feb 24: REVIEW

Feb 27: Midterm examination.

Catholicism in America


Mar 3: Late 20th century Catholicism and Interreligious Dialogue. Read chapter 48 in WAR, selections from the Vatican II Council, and Thomas Merton’s “Monastic Experience and East-West Dialogue” (owlspace).

Judaim in America

Mar 6: Understanding American Judaism. Read chapters 20, 38, and 47 in WAR.

The “Spiritual but not Religious”: History and Development


Mar 10: Transcendentalism and the Origins of “Spirituality.” Read Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Harvard Divinity School Address” and “The Oversoul.” (owlspace)

Mar 13: SPRING BREAK!

Mar 15: SPRING BREAK!


Mar 22: Spiritualism, Gender and the Women’s Suffrage Movement. Read chapter on “Spiritualism” in NRM.

Mar 24: New Thought and the Power of Positive Thinking. Read selections from Ralph Waldo Trine’s In Tune with the Infinite. We will watch a sermon from Joel Osteen, “Be Positive or Be Quiet,” on youtube.

East Meets West


Apr 3: Buddhism in America. Read DT Suzuki’s “Enlightenment and Ignorance” in Essays in Zen Buddhism (owlspace).

Apr 5: American Buddhism. Read Ann Gleig’s “From Theravada to Tantra: The Making of an American Tantric Buddhism?” and newspaper articles on mindfulness in the workplace (owlspace).

Religion in and as Culture

Apr 7: Psychologizing Religious Experience. Read lectures on “Mysticism” from William James’ The Varieties of Religious Experience.

Apr 10: The Human Potential Movement. Read selections from Abraham Maslow’s “Religion, Values and Peak Experiences” and selections from The Farther Reaches of Human Nature.

Apr 12: Welcome to the New Age. Read “Channeling and the New Age” in NRM. Watch youtube video of Jane Roberts channeling Seth.

Apr 14: Burning Man as a contemporary Spiritual but not Religious phenomenon. Watch clips from film “Documentary: Burning Man” and read Lee Gilmore’s “Ritual without Dogma” (owlspace).

Apr 17: American Islam. Read chapter 52 in WAR, read New York Times article, and watch Donald Trump speech on Muslim immigration. We will analyze Islamophobic discourse in youtube clips from Donald Trump and Bill Maher in class.


FINAL PAPER DUE: May 4th, 11:59pm
ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Pop quizzes:
Before each class, I will distribute 2-4 questions on the reading. When pop quizzes are given, the student will be responsible for writing a ½ page response to one of these questions to the best of their ability. Students may either: a) write a response before class and send it to my email (md12@rice.edu); or b) write a response during the first 5 minutes of class. In any case, responses are due to my email (md12@rice.edu) by 12:05pm on days I accept pop quizzes. The purpose of these pop quizzes is three-fold. First, they prime you to critically analyze university-level primary and secondary texts. Second, the questions on these pop quizzes are preparation for the midterm exam. Third, they serve as a means of taking attendance. Pop quizzes cannot be made up.

Participation:
While this class is designated as ‘lecture’, there will be ample time for discussion, conversation, and group analysis. My goal as an instructor is to promote group interpretation, analysis, and debate through focused questions. Your participation will be graded on two elements: a) articulation of your own interpretation and analysis; b) responses to the interpretation and analysis of your fellow students.

Midterm:
- Take home exam in two parts.
- Part One: 20 multiple choice questions on people, ideas, and groups covered in the readings and/or class meetings.
- Part Two: Choose 2 short essays (3-4 pages each) from the prompts (6 possible questions). These essays assess how the student critically analyzes religious phenomena. The student must answer one comparative question and one critical question.

Final paper (10-15 pages):
- The paper is intended for you to explore a theme, group, or time period that is of particular interest to you.
- After you have chosen your topic (no later than 11/4/16), begin researching immediately. Locate at least five sources relevant to your research topic. Ensure that at least one of those sources is primary, and at least one is secondary.
- Meet with instructor for 30 minutes to discuss topics and research sometime between 11/1-11/4.
- Final papers due 12/15/16 by 11:59pm.