Religion and the Making of American Culture
Spring 2015

Instructor Info:
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Course Description:
When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in the mid nineteenth century, "the religious aspect of the country" was one of the first things to capture his attention. Furthermore, he marveled at "the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things." Since this was written, Americans have debated back and forth over whether its history of religious devotion and religious pluralism has been a benefit or a detriment to its particular vision of freedom and democracy. For that reason, understanding America's religious past is critical to understanding its culture, politics, and relationship to the rest of the world in the modern day. Through readings, films, and in-class discussion, this course will explore the relationship between American religion, literature, film, music, economics, domestic politics, and foreign policy with the goal of developing students' cultural literacy.

Religion in the United States is so diverse that it is impossible to cover every movement in a single semester. As such, the syllabus for this course will be selective, and students will have opportunities to do research beyond what we cover in class. We will spend roughly the first third of the semester covering American Protestantism, which represents the American "mainstream" in the sense that it is the historically dominant religious group in American culture and politics (over 80% of US Presidents have had Protestant affiliations). Protestantism is also incredibly varied, with over 41,000 denominations and a rapidly growing non-denominational movement. From there, we will move to a selection of homegrown American sects, including the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Christian Science, and Scientology. We will then discuss religions that came to the United States from abroad, including religions that have been appropriated from their native contexts (Buddhism, yogic practice) and religions associated with immigrant and diasporic groups that have broad representation in the American populace and an important impact on American culture, though they have been historically subject to discrimination and represented as counter to the American mainstream.

Required Texts:
James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1953)
Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (2004)
Zane Gray, *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912)
Lawrence Wright, *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief* (2013)
Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889)
Spiegelman, *MAUS I: My Father Bleeds History* (1980, graphic novel)
Phillip Roth, *The Counterlife* (1986)
Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (1958)

A packet of additional readings provided by the instructor.

Assessment:
Student-led Discussion (20%)
Short Papers (40%)
Major Project (40%)

Attendance:
You are counted absent if you miss more than twenty minutes of any given class period. Regular and timely attendance is essential to doing well in this class. You are allowed 5 "free" absences for the entire semester. Each subsequent absence will result in the deduction of ½ a point from your final grade. If you are sick, you must give your doctor's note to Margarita Malikova in order to have the absence excused.

Make-up Work:
If a student receives a failing grade in the course, he/she may complete an additional writing project equivalent to the missed or failing assignment. This project must be completed during the designated make-up period and will be assessed by a three-member panel, including the course instructor.

Electronics:
Laptops, tablets, and e-readers are permitted so long as they do not become a disruption. If I suspect that an electronic device is being used inappropriately, I will ask you to turn it off and put it away. Cell phones should be turned off and kept in your bag or pocket.

Communication:
Students should check their nes.ru accounts regularly, as important information about the course (emergency cancellations, deadline changes) may be communicated in that way. Email is also the best way to reach me, though you should understand that I generally do not respond to email after 22:00 or before 9:00. If you have a question about an assignment, you should not wait until the morning it is due to ask.

Off-campus excursions:
This course will attempt to give you first-hand experience of the faiths we study. Though we are not in the United States, Moscow presents us with tremendous opportunities to encounter religions that are represented in both of our countries. Students will make *at least* one visit to a church or religious meeting outside of class. Though you are not required to participate in religious activities that conflict with your personal beliefs or make you feel uncomfortable, students are expected to be good representatives of NES and HSE by showing proper respect for members of that faith community.

Schedule (subject to change):
Homework assignments and required readings are listed on the date they are **due.*
***Scenes will be shown from certain films for the purposes of discussion, but we will not be screening entire movies in class. Students are encouraged but not required to view the entire film before the day we discuss it.*

Intro – Foundational Questions

Week 1 *(January 19 - 23)*
T – Introduction
F – Approaches to the study of religion in the United States
Reading: Excerpts from Prothero, *The American Jesus* and Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*

Unit I – Protestantism

Week 2 *(January 26 – 30)*
T – The Puritans
Reading - Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity"; Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown"; excerpt from Vowell, *The Wordy Shipmates*
F – Evangelicalism

Reading – Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"; excerpt from Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*

Week 3 *(February 2 - 6)*

T – The Protestant/Republican Contract

Reading – Founding documents; excerpt from Noll, *America's God*

F – Universalism & the Secularization Thesis

Reading –Emerson, selected essays

Week 4 *(February 9 – 13)*

T – The Conversion Experience

Reading – Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*

F – The Conversion Experience

Reading – Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*; Brooks, "From Edwards to Baldwin"

Week 5 *(February 16 – 20)*

T – Evangelical Popular Culture

Reading – Selections from Wallace, *Ben-Hur*; Miller, "The Charioteer and the Christ"
In-class viewing: scenes from Wyler, *Ben-Hur***

F – Evangelical Popular Culture

Reading – Squires, "The Wealthiest Man in the Empire"; Excerpts from LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*

Week 6 *(February 23 – 27)*

T – Mainline Protestantism

Reading – Robinson, *Gilead*

F – Mainline Protestantism

Reading – Robinson, *Gilead*

Unit II – American Sects

Week 7 *(March 2 – 6)*

T – Latter Day Saints

Reading – Excerpts from Smith, *The Book of Mormon*; Grey, *Riders of the Purple Sage*

F – Latter Day Saints

Reading – Grey, *Riders of the Purple Sage*; Carton, "American Scholars: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Joseph Smith, John Brown, and the Springs of Intellectual Schism"

Week 8 *(March 9 – 13)*

T – Christian Science

Reading – Excerpts from Eddy, *Science and Health*; Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection*

F – Christian Science

Reading – Squires, "All the News Worth Reading"; excerpt from James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Week 9 *(March 16 – 20)*

T – Scientology

Reading - Wright, *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief*

F - Scientology

Reading - Wright, *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief*

Week 10 *(March 23 – 27)*

Consultation Week – No classes

Unit III – Migrations and Diasporas

Week 11 *(March 30 – April 3)*

T – The Protestant/Catholic Conflict

Reading – Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*; excerpt from Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*

In-class viewing – scenes from Scorsese, *Gangs of New York*

F – The Protestant/Catholic Conflict

Reading – Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*; Schrager, "Mark Twain and Mary Baker Eddy: Gendering the Transpersonal Subject

Week 12 *(April 6 – 10)*

T – Catholicism

Reading – Flannery O'Connor, selected stories

F – Judaism

Reading – Excerpt from Weber, *Haunted in the New World*; Cahan, "A Ghetto Wedding"

In-class viewing – scenes from Stein, *Fiddler on the Roof* and Streisand, *Yentl*

Week 13 *(April 20 – 24)*

T – Judaism

Reading – Roth, "Defender of the Faith" and *The Counterlife*

F – Judaism

Reading – Roth, *The Counterlife*

Week 14 *(April 27 – May 1)*

T – Judaism

Reading – Spiegelman, *MAUS I: My Father Bleeds History*

F – No class, Spring Break

Week 15 *(May 4 – 8)*

Spring Break – No class

Week 16 *(May 11 – 15)*

T – Islam

Reading – Rushdie, selected essays; Mohja Kahf, selected poems

F – Islam

In class viewing – *Homeland*, Episode 109 ("Crossfire")

Unit IV – Appropriations

Week 17 *(May 18 – 22)*

T – Buddhism

Reading – Exerpt from Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism*; Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*

F – Buddhism

Reading – Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*

Week 18 *(May 25 – 29)*

T – Yoga

In-class viewing – *Kumare*

F – Yoga

In-class viewing – *Kumare*

Week 19 *(June 1 – 5)*

Exam Week – all final drafts due