This course explores major developments in American culture through the lens of religious history. We will aim to make sense of American culture, from the period of the Revolution to the present, by examining its religious dimensions, the interplay of religious and secular culture, and the religious roots and consequences of broad cultural change. Though the class will touch on many of the defining movements in American religious history, it is not a survey of American religion. Instead it is an introduction to a range of big cultural problems and the role of religion in defining, expressing, and shaping them. The class proceeds in a more or less chronological fashion, moving through a series of key moments—the separation from the British empire, the rise of market culture, the consolidation of national power, the emergence of consumer culture, the cold war, and the crisis of modernity—and culminating in an assessment of the contemporary scene.

Topics include religion and social values, slavery and race, political discourse, reform, gender, and the emergence of new religions. Special attention will be given throughout to the popular and mass cultural dimensions of American religious experience, the evangelical tradition, the links between religion and economy, and the persistence of religious belief in American culture into the early twenty-first century.

**Texts**


Other required readings for the class (marked with an “*” below) will be available through Sakai. **You must print out all assigned readings and bring them to class.**
Course Requirements

Class Participation: This is an informal lecture class with a great deal of discussion mixed in. You must attend consistently and come prepared to engage actively with the course materials. Also, twice during the semester you will prepare discussion questions for the assigned source readings of the week.

Paper #1: Textual Analysis or Material Culture Analysis (3-5 pages). Details to be provided in class. Due March 1.

Paper #2: Study of the contemporary politics of religion or religious meanings in contemporary popular culture (5-7 pages). Details to be provided in class. Due April 26.

Midterm Exam: A combination of identifications and essay questions pertaining to the readings and lectures from the first half of the semester. In class, March 8.

Final Exam: A take-home exam consisting of essay questions pertaining to the readings and lectures from the entire semester. Due Friday, May 7.

Learning Goals

In addition to gaining a working command of the content described above, students will:

• develop skills in the close reading of primary sources
• strengthen their ability to assess and engage in scholarly debates about American religion from a range of disciplinary perspectives
• learn to write more fluently and persuasively about complex cultural and historical problems
• develop analytical questions and perspectives and articulate them in the classroom (including twice making informal presentations of discussion questions)

Grading

I will use the following percentages as guidelines in determining final grades.

Participation: 15%

Paper #1: 15%

Paper #2: 25%

Midterm: 20%

Final: 25%

Plagiarism

It is your responsibility to understand and honor the university’s academic integrity policy: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml If you need further information, or are unsure of a particular situation, talk to me before you hand in work.
Schedule of Meetings and Topics

I. The Revolution

Week One (1/25): Introduction

Week Two (2/1): A Chosen People?

Topics: • Religion in Red, White, and Black  
        • The Puritans and the Protestant Ethic

Readings: Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, chap. 1  
          Raboteau, *Canaan Land*, chap. 1  
          *Arthur Barlowe Sees America as the Garden of Eden*

Week Three (2/8): The Great Awakening and The Revolution

Topics: • The Great Awakening  
        • Origins of American Evangelical Tradition  
        • Religion in the Age of Revolution

Readings: Butler, chaps 2, 6, 7  
          *George Whitefield, Journals*, 1740

Week Four (2/15): The Clergy and the Early Republic

Topics: • Unitarianism, Pluralism, and Disestablishment  
        • Feminization and Professionalization

Readings: Moore, *Selling God*, chaps 2, 3  
          *Selections from The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher*

Part II: The Kingdom

Week Five (2/22): The Second Great Awakening

Topics: • Revivals, Gender, and Power  
        • Voluntarism, Slavery, and Reform

Readings: Butler, chaps. 8, 9  
          *Charles G. Finney, from Lectures on Revivals of Religion*
Week Six (3/1): God of the Middle Class?

Topics:  
• Refinement, Domesticity, and Consumption  
• Outsider Religion in Antebellum America

Readings:  
Moore, chaps. 1, 4, 5  
*Catharine E. Beecher, from A Treatise on Domestic Economy*

**Paper #1 due at the beginning of class**

Week Seven (3/8): Slavery and Civil War

Topics:  
• Slave Religion  
• The Civil War as Apocalypse and Redemption

Readings:  
Butler, chap. 5 and Epilogue  
Raboteau, chaps. 3, 4  
*Nat Turner, Religion and Slave Insurrection*

**Midterm Exam in Class**

Spring Break--no class 3/15

Week Eight (3/22): Toward a Social Gospel

Topics:  
• The Social Gospel and Liberal Protestantism in the Gilded Age  
• The New Immigration

Readings:  
Moore, chaps. 7, 8  
*Walter Rauschenbusch, from Christianity and the Social Crisis (1907)*

Part III: The Modern Dilemma

Week Nine (3/29): Populism and Fundamentalism

Topics:  
• William Jennings Bryan  
• The Transformation of the Evangelical Tradition
*Sydney Ahlstrom, “Dissent and Reaction in Protestantism”

Week Ten (4/5): Mass Religion and Popular Culture

Topics: • Celebrity and Piety from Henry Ward Beecher to Father Divine
• Technology and Progress
• Spectacle

Readings: Raboteau, chap. 5
Allitt, *Major Problems*, 281-289
*Tonya Hangan, from *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion & Popular Culture in America*

Week Eleven (4/12): The Age of Pluralism

Topics: • Ethnicity and Religion
• Cold War consensus

Readings: Carroll, *American Requiem*, 1-123

Film: *Elmer Gantry* (Richard Brooks, 1960)

Week Twelve (4/19): Civil Rights and the 60s

Topics: • African-American Religion in the Age of Civil Rights and Black Power
• Anti-war and counterculture

Raboteau, chaps. 6, 7
Allitt, *Major Problems*, 360-362

Part IV: Contemporary Questions

Week Thirteen (4/26): The Crisis of Pluralism

Topics: • God in the 70s
• The Religious Right and the Culture Wars

Film: *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973)

**Paper #2 due at the beginning of class**

Week Fourteen (5/3): The Postmodern, the Global, and the New Faith

Topics:
- The Iconography of Contemporary Religion
- Pop and Politics
- Multiculturalism, Globalism, and Cosmopolitanism

*Clarence E. Hardy III, “From Exodus to Exile: Black Pentecostals, Migrating Pilgrims, and Imagined Internationalism”*
*Trysh Davis, “It Will Change the World if Everyone Reads this Book: New Thought Religion in Oprah’s Book Club”*

***Final Exam: Take-Home—Due by 5:00 PM, May 7***