

American Religious History

REL 241 | Fall 2021

T/TR 11:00-12:15 | PRESIDENTS HALL 207

Instructor: Dr. Lauren Horn Griffin

lhgriffin1@ua.edu

Office: 3033 Houser Hall

Office Hours: Tuesday from 1-2 pm or by appointment

GTA: Jacob Barrett

jbarrett4@crimson.ua.edu

Course Description

On the surface, this course looks at religious themes and movements in American culture, including everything from indigenous traditions to contemporary movements we call “religious.” But beneath the surface, we will explore how history is produced and narrativized and to what social ends. Because classes just like this one have a huge role in shaping answers to those questions, we are going to read an older textbook (cheaper for you!) commonly used in courses like this. We will consider the author’s approach to telling the story of “religion in America” and think about how these types of books, these types of courses, and this type of discourse among the general public actually shapes the way we conceive of both “religion” and “America.” Along the way, you will have the opportunity to gain many new insights into the doctrinal and ritual dimensions of several cultural practices; however, the main point of the course is to figure out and articulate the assumptions, values, and goals that shape our thinking about America (and other stuff!).

Overall, my goal is to encourage you to be curious about how you think — what do you normalize and/or tend to take for granted, how do you go about using different words to describe and navigate the world around you? Why do these processes matter?

Our course engages with three basic questions:

- **Definitional:** What is “religion”? Who decides what gets to count as religion in America?
- **Methodological:** How can or should we study “religion” in America?
- **Theoretical:** How is “religion in America” narrativized? Who gets to tell what story? What are the social consequences?

Learning Goals

Together, we'll practice how we

1. **recall** figures and events in American religious history.
2. **critique** historical narratives of religion in America.
3. **analyze** constructions of "religion" in American history.
4. **apply** the social theories we encounter to cultural artifacts.

Required Resources

Gaustad, Edwin S., Mark A. Noll, and Heath W. Carter. A Documentary History of Religion in America. 4th edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2018.

Gaustad, Edwin and Leigh Schmidt. The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today. New York: HarperOne, 2004.

Other resources are accessible in Blackboard or in class

Browsers

Chrome or Firefox work best with Blackboard (avoid Safari). Make sure you are [using the most up-to-date browser](#). For technology support, contact the [IT Service Desk](#).

Course Communication

Slack

We will be using Slack for our main course communication. Emails often get lost in the shuffle. Slack allows us to send instant messages so we can chat in real time (or, if you Slack me when I'm unavailable, I'll see it when I return). Plus, it's where we post pics of our pets!

I recommend you [download the app](#) to your computer and mobile device so you receive push alerts for my announcements and DMs. [Click here](#) to get started, or go to our course channel rel105.slack.com and sign in with your Bama credentials.

Blackboard

I will post course content here in Blackboard. This is also where I will provide feedback and discuss grades with you in the appropriate "assignment" window in Blackboard, so please check in the assignment for notes from me

Zoom

Just in case we ever need it, I have set up a [Zoom link](#) for our course.

Meeting ID: 815 4883 1012

Password: 241

Course Components

Discussion Posts/Participation/TQEs	45%
Blog posts (3)	30%
Midterm	5%
Presentations	10%
Final	10%
Total	100%

Required course work consists of substantive discussions and Flipgrids, blog posts, a Flipgrid midterm, and a final essay exam. Assignment instructions, details, and due dates will be posted in Blackboard.

NOTE: I see A+ grades as above and beyond, thus I usually reserve them for the top 0-1% of students.

Late Work

Late work is handled on a case by case basis and, if possible, advanced notice is required. Please don't hesitate to reach out with questions or concerns!

Discussion Questions and Participation

Compose weekly discussion questions (200-word minimum) and post on the board to demonstrate comprehension and interrogation of the material. You will include **at least two quotes/citations/references** from the text, and at least one of those cannot be from the first 3 pages of the reading (or first 3 minutes of a video/podcast). These questions will structure our discussions on Thursdays, so please read your colleague's contributions. **You will "like" the question** you are most interested in (other than your own), and we will address the questions voted up by the class.

TQE

At the end of each unit you will post a short Flipgrid video assignment called a TQE, where you post a 2-minute video of your main Thought, Question, and Epiphany for the unit (with a most creative video contest!). Record your 2-minute TQE and click submit. You must mention/refer to/quote at least one source from the unit in your TQE. Replies/comments on your classmate's TQEs encouraged but not required.

Midterm

This is a Flipgrid of no more than 10 minutes. The midterm is self-graded, and the grade you assign is meant to evaluate yourself on the first half of our course.

In a Flipgrid video, address the following questions:

- 1) What has been one major misconception about "religion" (or religions) that this course has highlighted thus far?
- 2) What has been your favorite reading/resource/anecdote and why did that make an impact? (Yes, you can name more than one).
- 3) Of all our key terms so far, which **three** have stood out to you and why?
- 4) Evaluate yourself on the first half of the course (0-10). Have you completed the readings/resources in full? Have you dedicated the time and effort to craft quality discussion and blog posts? Do you feel like you've fully engaged and put in a good-faith effort?

Presentations

You will give a brief talk (5-10 mins) over a group sometimes called "religious" (or sometimes not) that is not covered by our textbook. This can include new religious movements like Scientology, beliefs like simulation theory, or groups like Soul Cycle. This will help us challenge the colloquial definition of religion (or "cult") and think about definitions and classifications. There will be a sign-up sheet with a list of possible topics and readings.

Final

You will have a limited time (3 hours) to respond (in essay form) to a new source that we have not covered in class. You will analyze this unseen source by applying the resources from our course. You **must cite at least two readings/resources from every unit** in your analysis.

Extra Credit: You may earn a total of three extra points over the course of the semester. These points can be accumulated by annotating (using Hypothes.is) up to three news articles (I will try to post opportunities often). If you find a news article you would like to analyze with our course framework/you see our course themes playing out in the news, send me the link to the news article and I will set it up for the class. This is a "ripped from the headlines" approach: if you see something in the world that relates to or reminds you of the concepts we've been covering in class, annotate it for credit. I encourage you to submit extra credit immediately upon completing it.

Blog Posts

You will respond to the unit prompt for the blog posts. If you have not included all of the required components (or not treated them sufficiently), **your submission will be returned for edits**. You will comment on at least two of your classmate's blogs each blog week.

Course Schedule

8/19 Introductions

Unit 1: Bringing "Religion" to America

8/24 Bringing the Catholic Church to the New World

- The Religious History of America (RHA): Chapter 1
- A Documentary History of Religion in America (DHRA): "New Spain" pp. 13-18

8/26 Anglican Establishment in Virginia

- RHA: Chapter 2
- DHRA: "England Anew: Virginia" pp. 26-33

8/31 Puritan Establishment in New England

- RHA: Chapter 3
- DHRA: "England Anew: Massachusetts" pp. 33-36; "Anne Hutchinson" pp. 49-50

9/2 Experiments in Freedom of Conscience

- RHA: Chapter 4
- DHRA: "Special Cases: Maryland, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania" pp.37-43

9/7 Backwoods Backlash to the Establishment

- RHA: Chapter 5
- DHRA: "Back Country Baptists" pp.60-62; "Coming to Hear Whitfield" & "Stephen Bordley, Opposer" pp.83-87

9/9 Colonial Slavery

- Jon Butler, "Slavery and the African Spiritual Holocaust" (Blackboard)
- DHRA: "Episcopal Frustration" pp. 72-73; "Sanctifying the Slave System" pp. 75-76

9/14 - 9/16 Blog and response week

No class. **Blog 1 due on Wed, 10/15** responses due by Friday 10/17. **TQE due by 9/19**

Unit 2: Power, Identity, and “Nation”

9/21 “Religion” in a New Republic

- RHA: Chapter 6
- DHRA: “Aftermath of Revolution: Religious Liberty Guaranteed” pp. 103-113

9/23 National Revivalism

- RHA: Chapter 7
- DHRA: “The Voluntary Societies and Society’s Reform” pp. 125-128; “Charles Finney” pp. 130-133 “Baptist Conversion” pp. 134-135 “Methodist Circuit” pp. 140-142

9/28 Antebellum Sectarianism

- DHRA: “Complex Marriage” pp. 186-187 “Alexander Campbell” pp.199-202 “Millennialism” pp.202-207 “Spiritualism” pp. 208-209

9/30 The Black Church

- Albert Raboteau, “The Independent African Church Movement” (Blackboard)
- DHRA: “Toward Black Methodism” pp.135-138; “Jarena Lee’s Call to Preach” pp. 138-139

10/5 Slave Religion

- Raboteau, “‘The Invisible Institution’: Religion Among the Slaves”
- DHRA: “Black Religion and Slavery” pp. 211-224

10/7 Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism

- Corrigan & Neal, Anti-Catholicism
- DHRA: “Nativism” pp.177-181

10/12- 10/14, Blog and response week

No class. **Blog 2 due on Wed, 10/13** responses due by Friday, 10/15. **TQE due by 10/17**

Unit 3: Protestantism and its Others

10/19 Christian Slavery and Christian War

- RHA: Chapter 9
- DHRA: "Harriet Beecher Stowe" pp. 245-248; "James Henley Thornwell" pp. 254-255 "The Baptists" pp. 260-263

Flipgrid Midterm due Wednesday, 10/20

10/21 The Protestant Establishment

- United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind (Blackboard)
- Asian Exclusion Act (Blackboard)
- DHRA: "Liberty" pp. 323-325; "Unsafe for Democracy" pp. 457-465

10/26 Old-Time Religion or Modern Culture?

- RHA: Chapter 14
- DHRA: "Billy Sunday" pp. 397-398; "Dispensationalism" pp. 402-405 "Protestantism" pp.442-447

10/28 FALL BREAK

11/2 Religion in the "American Way of Life"

- RHA: Chapter 15
- DHRA: "Cold War" pp. 501- 502; "Federal Council of Churches" pp. 519-521 "A Catholic President" pp. 545-547

11/4 The Race of Religion in America

- Paul Harvey, "Religion and Civil Rights: The Color of Power" (Blackboard)
- DHRA: "Fighting for Liberation: African Americans" pp.568-579

11/9 Pluralism, Protestantism, Nationalism

- RHA: Chapter 18
- DHRA: "Religious Freedom" pp. 632-636; "Ronald Reagan" pp. 636-639 "President George W. Bush" pp. 717 "Interview with Eric Metaxas" pp. 746-748

11/11 Religious freedom

11/16 - 11/18

No class. **Blog 3 due 11/17**, comments due 11/19. **TQE due by November 21**

11/23

11/25 THANKSGIVING, no class

11/30- Consuming Religion in a “secular age”

[Podcast](#) with Kathryn Lofton on her book Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon

Introduction, *Consuming Religion* by Kathryn Lofton (on Blackboard)

12/2- Consuming Religion

Choose a chapter in *Consuming Religion* (on Blackboard) and prepare to present the main points

12/6-12/10; Finals week

Short final essay due anytime during finals week. Once opened, you have three hours to finish. Open book open note. Window will close on **Friday at 5pm**.

Support for You

Academic Support Services

A variety of [academic support resources, programs, and services](#) are available to UA students. These resources include tutoring, advising, mentoring, and [The Writing Center](#).

Student Needs

The departments of Student Health and Wellbeing within the Division of Student Life includes [Collegiate Recovery and Intervention Services](#), the [Counseling Center](#), [Women and Gender Resource Center](#), [Health Promotion and Wellness](#), the [Student Health Center and Pharmacy](#), and [University Recreation](#). [Food assistance](#) is also available to support students in need.

Library Online

Access digital materials and other resources at [UA libraries](#).

IT Help and Student Technology Support

The Office of Information Technology provides an array of services to students at UA. Whether you need a machine to work on your paper, assistance with your email or Blackboard accounts, getting on the network, or any other services used by UA students, contact the [IT Service Desk](#).

Registration and Withdrawal

If you choose to withdraw from this course, you must complete the appropriate University form and turn the form in before the deadline. Deadlines are shown in the [Academic Calendar](#).

Academic Integrity

In addition to the course conduct policies outlined in the Course Syllabus in the online classroom, please review the [Student Handbook](#).

It is the responsibility of each student to be familiar with the definitions, policies, and procedures concerning academic misconduct. Please revisit our [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) for more information. This site also defines misconduct, provides examples of prohibited conduct, and explains the sanctions available for those found guilty of misconduct.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the most common form of academic misconduct at UA. It is the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit. This includes the copying of language, structure, or ideas of another and attributing (explicitly or implicitly) the work to one's own efforts. Plagiarism means using another's work without giving credit.

For more information about plagiarism, see [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) section C.1.2.

Reasonable Accommodation for Disabilities

UA is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for all students with disabilities. Students with disabilities who require accommodations in this course should contact their professor as early in the semester as possible.

Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services prior to receiving accommodations in this course.

If you have a disability and you would like to make a request for reasonable accommodation, please see the Student Handbook or get in touch with the [Office of Disability Services](#).

Adjustments for Pregnancy/Childbirth Related Issues

Should you need modifications or adjustments to your course requirements because of documented pregnancy-related or childbirth-related issues, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss your options. Generally, modifications will be made where medically necessary and similar in scope to accommodations based on temporary disability. Learn more about the rights of pregnant and parenting students by consulting the [Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#).

Title IX Resources

For any concerns regarding gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, stalking, or intimate partner violence, the University offers a variety of resources, including advocates on-call 24/7, counseling services, mutual no contact orders, scheduling adjustments, and disciplinary sanctions against the perpetrator. Please see the [Title IX website](#) for more information.

Religious Holidays

It is the policy of the University to excuse absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required classwork that may fall on religious holidays without penalty. It is the responsibility of the student to make alternate arrangements with the instructor at least one week prior to the actual date of the religious holiday.

Severe Weather Protocol

Please be familiar with UA's [severe weather guidelines](#) and be prepared to quickly move to safety if severe weather occurs.

Copyright Policy

It is illegal to download, upload, reproduce, or distribute any copyrighted material, in any form and in any fashion, without permission from the copyright holder or his/her authorized agent. UA expects all members of its community to comply fully with federal copyright laws.