

HI 450-03, Fall 2009

MWF 12:30-1:20

Room 318

<http://wschi450amrel.blogspot.com/>

## Religions in America

Prof. Tona Hangen

Office: Sullivan 327B, x8688

e: [thangen@worchester.edu](mailto:thangen@worchester.edu)

### Course Description and Objectives

In his book, *Modern Times*, Paul Johnson wrote: "What is important in history is not only the events that occur but the events that obstinately do not occur. The outstanding non-event of modern times was the failure of religious belief to disappear." This is the same argument put forward in the brand new exploration of the global religion explosion by two of the editors of Economist magazine, titled God is Back. Whether God was ever really gone is a topic we'll discuss at some length in this course by analyzing the ongoing conversation in American culture between secularism and religiosity. We are the most religiously diverse nation in the world, and that religiousness has a particular, fascinating, violent, and unique history - which too often goes unexamined in US history courses. This course offers a corrective by considering US history through the lens of American religions: from convent to temple to court to contentious public square; from television to the internet to the halls of Congress - once you start looking, it's hard to miss.

The objectives of this course are to introduce you to a variety of religious perspectives, peoples, and denominations in America's past and present. At the end of the course you will be familiar with a wider range of religions found in our community and nation. The course also introduces basic principles of interfaith dialogue, a skill you will undoubtedly put to practical use in your life. We will explore how religion informed events and ideas in American history, through focused case studies. This is not a survey course, so some prior knowledge of American history is assumed. No prerequisite required, although HI 111, 112 or 113 is recommended.

### Required Texts

Diana Eck, *New Religious America*, Paperback (Harper One) ISBN 978-0060621599

*Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Penguin Classics) ISBN 978-0141185439

Noah Feldman, *Divided by God* (Farrar Strauss Giroux) ISBN 978-0374530389

Some of our readings are available on the course Blackboard page as PDF documents. You will need (free) Adobe Reader or FoxIt Reader to open them. You should plan to print them, or bring your laptop to class if you choose to read them online. You will need them in class the day we discuss them. Not having them in class will count the same as an absence on that day.

Any changes to the syllabus will be updated on the course blog, <http://wschi450amrel.blogspot.com/>.

You should check it often through Blackboard. The blog is not just for assignments and course business, but also as a running commentary on the news, current events, religion on the internet, and anything else that crosses our collective mind.

## Course Requirements

This course involves reading, writing, research and group discussion. You will be expected to read 50-100 pages a week (sometimes more), and to write approximately 30 pages over the course of the term. You will need to put in consistent effort during the whole semester. You'll need to have (or learn) basic computer research skills. You'll need to speak up in class and demonstrate active learning, not passive absorption. **Learning is not a spectator sport.**

Your grade is made up of many small assignments, which means you'll need to stay on top of them throughout the semester. There will be an exam or a due date nearly every week. That said, most of the large assignments are front-loaded in the early part of the semester, so be aware that you'll be busier in the first half of the term than at the end.

- **Attendance and participation** in class – I will take attendance in each class session. You should be on time and ready for discussion each day. I expect class discussion will be lively, respectful, and substantive, and that you will have done that day's assigned reading before class.  
**Bring each day's reading assignment (book, article, whatever) with you to class** so you can refer to it during our discussion.
- **Exams** – we will have 4. The lowest exam will be dropped. There are no makeup exams.
- **Site Visit** – you will attend a worship service of a local church that is not your own, in September or the first week of October. Everyone visits a different house of worship (believe me, Worcester has plenty to choose from). From that visit, you'll write a profile of that church/congregation which will be posted in an online archives of Worcester history, <http://digitalworcester.org>. Your profile should be accompanied by some multi-media content, such as a printed program, photographs (with permission), or an audio or video recording (again, with permission) which we will upload to the site. The assignment also includes a short (1-page) reflection paper for my eyes only. Due date is 10/14.
- **Response Papers:** 4 are due on the dates listed below. They are short, but well-written, commentary on an assigned course reading.
- **Personal Statement** – a short reflective paper, due in the second week of class.
- **Film Paper** – you'll write a 5 page analysis of a film that deals with the afterlife, spirits, ghosts or angels. You'll choose your own film, but everyone's film must be unique. Your paper will deconstruct the film's theology. Paper is due on 10/7.
- **Final Project = Research Paper** – a 7-8 page paper, comparing/contrasting two historical documents, chosen from a list that I'll provide.

Your grade will be determined this way:

Attendance & Participation	15%	Silent attendance will not earn full credit
Exams	30%	Exam dates: 9/25, 10/9, 10/30, 11/20
Response Papers 4 @ 2.5% each	10%	Due dates: 9/4, 10/23, 11/13, 12/4
Site Visit & Digital Project	15%	Due 10/14
Personal Statement	5%	Due 9/11
Film Paper	10%	Due 10/7
Research Paper	15%	Due 12/9
	100%	

### The Fine Print

- My in-class technology policy: we will be busy in every class session, and we don't need any technological distractions. Silence your cell phones before you enter the classroom. If you choose to bring a laptop to class, I expect that you will be using it **only** for taking notes or accessing the course's relevant electronic documents to refer to during discussion. Do not use your laptop in class to surf the internet, check your email, update your Myspace page, or the like.
- On papers and exams, doing your own work is absolutely essential – if you plagiarize a paper/assignment or cheat on an exam, you will get a ZERO on the assignment and you may also fail the class. In **ALL** your writing, you **must** cite the sources of any quotations, information or ideas which are not your own words or work. Please familiarize yourself with the college policy on Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook, and with proper methods of citation. In this class you may use MLA or Chicago Style format for your papers.
- If you have a documented disability (learning or otherwise), and you need a reasonable accommodation made for you in this course, please consult with me immediately at the outset of the course so we can design a solution that will help you be successful in the class.

### Things That Must Be Said Up Front

Religious history brings up special considerations for scholars and students, and so there are some ground rules for this course.

1) All religions are true to their believers. All religious rituals, acts, beliefs, and doctrines make sense in context. If something doesn't make sense to you, then you need more context. Don't think "how could they believe that?" but instead seek understanding: "Why was this believable to them?" Take statements of religious belief or disbelief at face value (but not necessarily as historical fact).

2) No religious concept should be dismissed as weird, crazy or abnormal. There is no “normal.” You can certainly have your own opinions and personal beliefs about religion, but those don’t belong in our classroom discussion.

3) Except for the first writing assignment, you will approach your scholarship as a historian, rather than as a believer or a skeptic. This is a history class, not a CCD or Sunday School class. While religious doctrines will be discussed, it is never with the intent to prove a religion right or wrong. No one may use our class as a platform for either proselytizing their faith to convert others, or debunking the faith of others to lessen their commitment. Our class is going to be made up of a variety of faiths and degrees of religious involvement which we should all respect.

## Syllabus

Week	Topic	Date	Reading	What’s Due
1	Course Intro	9/2		
	Is Sports an American Religion?	9/4	“Sports: An American Religion” [pdf]	RP #1
2	A New Religious America	9/9	Eck 1	
	Religion on the Web	9/11		Paper #1: Personal
3	Origins: Colonial Context	9/14	Eck 2.1 (skim 26-32, read 32-41 closely)	
	Puritans	9/16	Bradstreet, Rowlandson, Winthrop, Hambrick-Stowe	
	Quakers, Slaves and Dissenters	9/18	Maryland Act, Penn, Hidden Objects	
4	Origins: Founding Parents	9/21	Feldman 1	
	Founding Documents	9/23	Locke, “Letter Concerning Toleration;” Jefferson, VA Act; Madison, “Memorial and Remonstrance”	
	Exam #1	9/25		Exam #1
5	Antebellum Spiritual Hothouse 1: (Myth of) the Protestant Century	9/28	Moore	
	American Revivals	9/30	Second Great Awakening: NC History Online	
	Antebellum Slave Religion	10/2	Raboteau, “The Slaves’ Own Religion”	
6	Antebellum Spiritual Hothouse 2: Transcendentalism	10/5	Essay from “The Dial” online	
	Antebellum Spiritual Hothouse 3: Spiritualism	10/7	No reading	Paper #2: Film
	Exam #2	10/9		Exam #2
7	Columbus Day, No School	10/12		
	Religion in Worcester	10/14	No reading	Site Report

Week	Topic	Date	Reading	What's Due
	Digital Project Upload Day	10/16	No reading	Meeting spot: TBA
8	Radical Redefinitions 1: Shaker	10/19	"The Shakers' Brief Eternity" [pdf]	
	Radical Redefinitions 2: Oneida	10/21	Oneida documents [pdf]	
	Radical Redefinitions 3: Mormon	10/23	Feldman 2.2 and Mormon document [online link]	RP #2
9	Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in America	10/26	Feldman 2.1	
	Melting Pot Pluralism	10/28	Eck 2.2 (skim 41-48, read 48-61 closely)	
	Exam #3	10/30		Exam #3
10	Case Studies in the Freedom to Worship: Hindus	11/2	Eck 3	
	Case Studies: Buddhists	11/4	Eck 4	
	Case Studies: "Legal Secularists" and Jehovah's Witnesses	11/6	Feldman 5	
11	Malcolm X and Religion in the Civil Rights Movement	11/9	Malcolm X, Part 1	
	Veterans Day, No School	11/11		
	Malcolm X and Religion in the Civil Rights Movement	11/13	Malcolm X. Part 2	RP #3
12	Why "Family Values" is a Religious Issue	11/16	Feldman 6	
	Family Feuds	11/18	Bring one article about the abortion debate and one about the same-sex marriage debate	
	Exam #4	11/20		Exam #4
	Religion in Popular Culture	11/23	In-class viewing, M*A*S*H episode	
	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	11/25 and 11/27		
13	What is Islam?	11/30	No reading	
	Muslims in America	12/2	Eck 6	
	The American Muslim Community after 9/11	12/4	Bring a current event article	RP #4
14	Principles of Interfaith Dialogue	12/7	Eck 7	
	Reconciliation	12/9	Feldman 7-8	Final Project