

# History 6687

## American Religion and Politics

### Fall 2007

Instructor: Dr. Dan Williams  
Office Hours: TLC 3225  
MW, 11-12, 1:30-4:00  
Tues, 4-5  
(and by appointment)

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Class Location:  
TLC 3205  
Tues., 5:30-8:00

#### **Description:**

This graduate seminar will give you the opportunity to read recent works of scholarship on the history of church-state relations and religious influences on politics in the United States. The course will explore controversial issues that have a direct bearing on current political debates, and it will give you the opportunity to read diverse scholarly views on the historic role of American religion in public education, electoral politics, social reform, civil rights, and other matters pertaining to the state. You will have the opportunity to discuss these issues at length with your colleagues in our 2 ½ hour class meetings, and you may occasionally have the chance to explore some of these concepts with visiting scholars, as well.

Classes will consist primarily of discussion sessions, which will give you the opportunity to interact with your colleagues, explore new points of view, ask questions, and present your interpretations of the readings.

#### **Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this course, you will have read twelve monographs and several additional articles and book chapters that explore a wide variety of issues pertaining to religion and politics in the US. This course will help you to develop critical thinking skills and the ability to analyze opposing points of view, and it will also give you the knowledge that you need to evaluate contemporary controversies over the role of religion in American politics. By the end of this semester, you will have an in-depth understanding of the various ways in which religion has influenced American politics, both positively and negatively, during the past three centuries. You will also have a better understanding of historiographical debates relating to this topic. This course will also help you to improve your writing, research, and communication skills.

**Assessment:**

Students' final grades will be determined as follows:

Class participation	30%
Book reviews (10% each)	30%
Historiography paper	30%
Class presentation	10%

There will be no opportunity for extra-credit assignments in this course.

**Grading Methodology:** This university does not use a plus / minus grading system, but during the course of the semester, I will use plus / minus grades, as well as split-letter grades (e.g., an A- / B+), in order to evaluate students' written work with precision. In computing final course grades, I convert all grades into numeric scores according to the following system:

A = 95

A/A- = 94

A- = 92

A-/B+ = 90

B+ = 88

B+/B = 87

B = 85

B/B- = 84

B- = 82

B-/C+ = 80

(A similar pattern is used for grades in the C-range).

In computing final course grades, a grade average of 89.5 or higher converts to a course grade of A, a grade average between 79.5 and 89.49 converts to a course grade of B, and a grade average between 69.5 and 79.49 converts to a course grade of C.

A-range grades, including the grade of A-/B+, are reserved for work that is of exceptional quality. In order to receive an A-range grade on an essay assignment, a student's essay must show evidence of original thinking and a thorough understanding of the relevant sources on the topic, as well as good writing technique. Papers that receive a grade of 90 or above must be cogent and persuasive in their argumentation, and they must be well written and tightly organized around a strong thesis. In short, a paper that receives an A-range grade not only meets the basic requirements for the assignment, but also demonstrates that a student has mastered the interpretative, analytical, and writing skills expected for a course at this level.

B-range grades are given to essays that demonstrate a student's accurate understanding of the material, adequate use of the assigned documents, and competence in writing. They rarely contain the sophisticated analysis required for an A-range essay, but they meet the requirements and expectations for the assignment.

C-range grades are given to essays that contain factual inaccuracies, errors in interpretation, inadequate use of the assigned documents, or poor writing technique, even though they usually meet most of the basic requirements for the assignment.

Failing grades are assigned to work that does not meet the requirements and expectations for the assignment.

**Book reviews:** You are required to write three 3-5 page reviews of books that you read for this course. Reviews are due on the date scheduled for the discussion of the book that you choose to review. You should turn in your first review before the end of September and your second review before the end of October. Book reviews that are not submitted on time will not be accepted.

A book review for this course should be structured according to the style used for book reviews in historical journals (e.g., *J. of American History*, *American History Review*, *J. of Southern History*, etc.). A review should give a brief summary of a book while highlighting its author's thesis or point of view, and it should also assess merits of the author's argument, as well as the book's contribution to the historical field.

**Historiography paper and presentation:** You will be expected to write a 15-18 page historiographical analysis of a particular aspect of the intersection between American religion and politics. The topic that you choose should be narrow enough to enable you to produce a comprehensive study of its historiography within a 15-18 page essay, but broad enough to allow you to find at least six books that are directly related to your theme. There are numerous topics that would fulfill this requirement. For example, acceptable topics might include, among other things, the Puritans' vision of the relationship between church and state, the religious views of the Founders, the religious impetus for the antislavery (or proslavery) movement, religion and American imperialism, an individual American president's use of civil religion, twentieth-century American Jews and church/state separation, the Scopes trial and the teaching of evolution in public schools, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s views on religion and politics, and the Christian Right. (I list these topics only for the purpose of giving you examples of the types of topics that might be acceptable; there are numerous other topics that would fit the requirements for this essay). You should choose the topic for your historiography paper by September 11. The source list of six books that are relevant for your subject is due on October 2. The historiography paper is due on November 13. If you would like to submit a preliminary draft for my comments, you should do so no later than November 6.

Papers that are turned in after the assigned date will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are overdue.

It should go without saying that all papers that you write must be your own work, and that any students who are caught plagiarizing another student's work, a paper from a web site, a textbook, or any other source will automatically fail this course and may be subject to further disciplinary action. Plagiarism is a serious offense that will not be tolerated.

All of your written work for this class must be original; you are not allowed to submit essays that you have written for other courses or that you have completed prior to this semester.

You will also be expected to give a ten-minute presentation summarizing your historiographical research and answer questions on your topic from your classmates for an additional ten minutes. I plan to reserve up to one hour per class for these presentations during each class period between October 30 and November 27, so I will expect you to give your presentation sometime between those dates.

**Class participation:** Since class sessions in this seminar course will consist almost entirely of class discussion, your participation in those discussions is crucial to the success of this course. It is imperative that you come to class prepared to talk about the assigned reading each week. I will determine your class participation grade at the end of the semester based on my perception of your level of preparedness for each class session, your willingness to participate in the discussion, and the perceptiveness of the comments that you make throughout the duration of this course. I understand that some students may be more inclined than others to speak up in class, but I hope to create an environment that will allow everyone, regardless of their personality or background, to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts on the readings. If you find yourself reluctant to join in the conversation for any reason, or if you feel that your class participation level does not adequately reflect your knowledge of the material and preparation for class, I would encourage you to meet with me early in the semester to discuss strategies that will enable you to succeed in earning a class participation grade that accurately reflects your work.

**Assigned readings:** I did not place an order at the university bookstore for the assigned monographs for this course, but you can easily order these books online. I have listed the ISBN and publication information for every assigned text so that you can order the correct editions. With only two exceptions, all of the assigned books are available in paperback. Many of these books are also available for 24-hour loan at the UWG library reserves desk. A list of books that are available for short-term loan is posted on the library's course reserve page for this class.

The two assigned journal articles are available through the JSTOR or Proquest databases, which you can access through the university library's website. The photocopied sections of book chapters and other assigned readings are available through the university library's online course reserves. To access those course reserves, go to the UWG library website and click on "course reserves." The course reserves page for this class is password protected, so you will need to get the password for the class from me.

**Class communication:** I may send out periodic email communiqués to students in this course, so please check your UWG email account regularly. The university administration has stipulated that all email communication between faculty and students

should take place on UWG email accounts, so please use your UWG email account for all electronic communications that you send me.

University policy also prevents me from disclosing grades over email, so if you would like to discuss your grade on any assignment in the class, please set up an appointment to meet with me in my office. Please do not email me with a request for your grades, since I am not allowed to email that information to you.

To protect students' privacy rights, I will not return graded papers to any third party (e.g., a student's friend or relative who asks to pick up a student's work on that person's behalf) unless a student gives me permission in writing (e.g., an email) to do so. There are occasions when I must disclose a student's grade to university administrators or other history department faculty (e.g., the department chair, students' advisors, or the graduate studies coordinator), but in all other cases, I will make every effort to maintain the confidentiality of students' grades.

I would like to do whatever I can to help you succeed in this course. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have a question about any subject pertaining to this class. I make it a priority to respond promptly to emails from students, and I am happy to talk with students during my office hours, so please feel free to stop by my office anytime that you want to discuss your concerns about this course. I believe that this will be an excellent semester, and I'm pleased to welcome you to this class.

## **Class Schedule:**

### Unit 1: The Role of Religion in the Formation of the United States

August 21: Introduction

August 28: The Founders' Views on Church and State

Discuss: Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton University Press, 2003; ISBN: 978-0691126029, pb, \$18.95)

September 4: The Religious Roots of Antebellum Social Reform

Discuss: Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; ISBN: 978-0195045680, pb, \$29.95)

Daniel Walker Howe, "The Evangelicals," pp. 150-180 in Howe, *The Political Culture of American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979) (online course reserves)

September 11: Religion and the Civil War

Discuss: Mitchell Snay, *The Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (UNC, 1993; ISBN: 978-0807846872, pb, \$25.00)

**Topic for historiography paper due**

### Unit 2: Religion's Role in Shaping Moral Legislation

September 18: Legislating Morality in the Gilded Age and Progressive Eras

Discuss: Gaines Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (UNC, 2002; ISBN: 978-0807853665, pb, \$21.95)

September 25: Mormon Polygamy: The Conflict Between Christian Moral Reformers and the Free Exercise of Religious Practice

Discuss: Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (UNC, 2002; ISBN: 978-0807849873, pb, \$21.95)

October 2: Catholics and Politics

Discuss: Evelyn Savidge Stern, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Cornell, 2003; ISBN: 978-0801441172, hb, \$37.50)

**Source list for historiography paper due**

October 9: A Case Study of a Religiously Inspired Politician

Discuss: Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (Knopf, 2006; ISBN: 978-0385720564, pb., \$16.95)

October 16: The Black Church in the Civil Rights Movement

Discuss: Lewis V. Baldwin, "On the Relationship of the Christian to the State: The Development of a Kingian Ethic," pp. 77-123 in Baldwin, *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion* (Notre Dame, 2002) (online course reserves)

Albert J. Raboteau, "'How Far the Promised Land?' Black Religion and Black Protest," pp. 57-76 in Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Beacon, 1995) (online course reserves)

Rosetta E. Ross, "Fannie Lou Hamer: Realizing Promises of Religious Faith and Hope," pp. 90-117 in Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Fortress, 2003) (online course reserves)

Clarence Taylor, "Expanding the Boundaries of Politics: The Various Voices of the Black Religious Community of Brooklyn, New York, Before and During the Cold War," pp. 37-47 in Taylor, *Black Religious Intellectuals: The Fight for Equality from Jim Crow to the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge, 2002) (online course reserves)

October 23: The Response of White Clergy to the Civil Rights Movement

Discuss: Michael B. Friedland, *Lift Up Your Voice Like a Trumpet: White Clergy and the Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements, 1954-1973*, pp. 3-139 (UNC, 1998; ISBN: 978-0807846469, pb, \$22.95)

James F. Findlay, "Religion and Politics in the Sixties: The Churches and the Civil Rights Act of 1964," *Journal of American History*, 77 (1990): 66-92

Joseph Crespino, "The Ambivalence of White Christians," pp. 144-172 in Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton, 2007) (online course reserves)

Unit 3: Civil Religion, Pluralism, and the Place of Religion in the Contemporary State

October 30: Civil Religion

Discuss: Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus*, 134 (Fall 2005): 40-55 (originally published in Winter 1967 issue) (available through Proquest on the UWG library website)

Gary Scott Smith, "George W. Bush: A Faith-Based Presidency," and "Conclusion," pp. 365-430 in Smith, *Faith and the Presidency* (Oxford, 2006) (online course reserves)

Historiography presentations

November 6: The Problem that Religious Pluralism Presents to Civil Religion

Discuss: Stephen Prothero, *A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America* (UNC, 2006; ISBN: 978-0807857700, pb, \$19.95)

Todd M. Kerstetter, "Uncle Sam's Land," pp. 167-177 in *God's Country, Uncle Sam's Land: Faith and Conflict in the American West* (University of Illinois, 2006) (online course reserves)

Historiography presentations

November 13: Religion in the Public Schools

Discuss: James W. Fraser, *Between Church and State: Religion and Public Education in a Multicultural America* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999; ISBN: 978-0312233396, pb, \$14.95)

Historiography presentations

**Historiography paper due**

November 20: Contemporary Debates about Religion and Politics

Discuss: James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (Basic Books, 1991; ISBN: 978-0465015344, pb, \$20.00)

Historiography presentations

November 27: What Role Should Religion Play in Contemporary Politics?

Discuss: Hugh Hecló et al., *Christianity and American Democracy* (Harvard, 2007; ISBN: 978-0674025141, hb, \$25.95)

Historiography presentations