

American Religious History, HI-571

Spring 2021 – Online—Synchronous, Tuesdays

Andrew Gardner

“Responsibility can’t be lost; it can only be abdicated. If one refuses abdication, one begins again.”

- *James Baldwin*

Course Description

Religious beliefs and practices are deeply embedded throughout the long and complicated history of the United States of America. This course seeks to interrogate the ways in which religion has both influenced and been influenced by broader American life and culture from the period of the colonization to the present day. Course readings, class discussion, and assignments will pay particular attention to way religion perpetuated and supported unsavory and problematic elements of US history including slavery, white supremacy, and economic injustice. In the same breath, however, the course will also pay attention to the way American religion functioned as a means of resisting unjust systems and advancing liberation in hopes of forming a more perfect union.

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to

1. Recognize and understand the significance of influential figures, institutions, movements, and theological developments within American Religious History. (MARS LO #1)
2. Analyze the role of religion in American life and culture more broadly (DOM LO #1)
3. Utilize historical methodologies to nuance, texture, and enhance their interpretation of contemporary American religious life. (MARS LO #4; DOM LO #2)
4. Think critically about the role history can play in theological formation (MARS LO #5; DOM LO #4))

Modality

This course will be taught synchronously online on Tuesday evenings from 6-8PM during the Spring 2020 semester.

Course Style

Class time will be divided between lecture and discussion. Roughly half of class time will be devoted to a lecture that will establish a framework for questions and discussion.

Required Reading

The course's two primary textbooks that can be found as ebooks through the Digital Theological Library and one course reader.

1. Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, Updated Edition, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008).
 - a. *This text will provide an introductory historical narrative.*
2. John Corrigan, Editor, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).
 - a. *This text will provide supplementary articles on specific topics.*
3. Primary Source Reader (Available on Canvas)
 - a. *This text will include primary source materials from American history.*

Assignments

Participation (15%)

Discussion Boards (15%)

- *Prior to each class period students will post two discussion boards. The first will include two substantive paragraphs that address at least one thing that piqued their curiosity from the reading and one question for discussion. The second will provide a substantive and respectful response to a colleague's discussion board.*

Newsletter/Flyer (15%)

- *Students will design a congregational/institutional newsletter or flyer to inform their constituency of a particularly important American figure, event, or idea. This assignment will provide you an opportunity to experiment with history to shape and guide your local community. As an example, students may design a newsletter or flyer debunking the idea that America was founded as a Christian Nation drawing upon their knowledge of America's founding era.*

Biography (20%)

- *Students will compose a 5 to 7-page biography of a significant figure in American Religious History they choose in consultation with the instructor. Students may choose to write this biography project either as a standard academic paper or as a four-week adult educational curriculum.*

Research Paper (35%)

- *Students will work with the instructor to identify a research topic early in the semester and will write a 10 to 12-page research paper investigating this topic. The paper will be due at the end of the semester.*

Course Outline

Class Date	Topic/Readings/Assignments
January 21	Topic – “The Idea of ‘Religious’ History”
January 28	Topic – Colonization
February 4	Topic – Puritanism/First Great Awakening
February 11	Topic – Judaism and Islam in Early America
February 18	Topic – Revolution and Disestablishment
February 25	Topic – Reform in Antebellum America/The Second Great Awakening
March 3	Topic – Slavery and Black Religion
March 10	Topic – Civil War/Reconstruction
March 17	Topic – American Immigration and Religion
March 24	Topic – The American Religious Periphery
March 31	Topic – Gilded Age/Social Gospel/Conservatism
April 7	Topic – WWI and WWII and the Rise of Neo-Orthodoxy
April 14	Topic – The Long Civil Rights Movement
April 21	Topic – The Year of the Evangelical
April 28	Topic – American Religious Pluralism
May 5	Topic – Closing Remarks