Course Description

Violence, hatred, and oppression; sexuality and gender politics; immigration, urbanization, and diversity; missions and empire building; solitary reflections and social experimentation; entertainment and consumer culture--the history of religions in the United States is as much about these topics as it is about particular traditions in American history. Indeed, historical investigations of Protestants, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Catholics, and other religious communities are greatly complicated when careful attention is given to the relations between specific traditions and the larger cultural contexts in which religion and religious life are expressed.

This introductory course in American religious history will foreground the “larger cultural context” by emphasizing the undeniable global currents and movements that have shaped, and are shaping, the diverse religious landscapes in the US. We will also pay close attention to the deep-rooted, and quite pervasive, Protestant influence in this larger cultural milieu by exploring the historical ramifications of conquest and colonization in the birth and expansion of the new nation. The scope of the course will encompass both national and regional histories, though we will draw from our own immediate local surroundings here in Atlanta to illustrate certain themes and trends.

Only after considering these two significant forces in US history (diasporas and hegemony) can we turn to specific details in the histories of particular religious communities and cultures. The reading assignments and lectures will trace these histories back and forth in time, focusing on a series of common religious categories that are especially revealing in the American context, such as ritual and practice, myth and ideology, transcendence and transformation.
In the end, though, we will collectively question and challenge the meaning of the term “religion” and consider alternatives to what we normally think counts as “religious” activities and identities. Besides our engagement with various religious traditions and communities, the class also explores religious forms of expression, solidarity, and conflict outside of these conventional boundaries. In other words, we will also emphasize forms of religious life beyond the church, synagogue, mosque, and other institutional settings. This will be a scholarly exercise with relevance to the present, but primarily carried out through historical analysis of the past.

**Required Texts**


**Articles**


-Gary Laderman, The Rise of the Religious `Nones’ Indicates the End of Religion as We Know It,” Huffington Post  


Expectations and Outcomes

Students should come to class on time and leave cell phones and other communication devices off during class. Emory College has a very serious honor code you've all read, memorized, and now live by. Please continue to do so in this class.

We will have many opportunities to discuss complicated, sometimes volatile topics during class and electronically. It is essential we all engage in these conversations with maturity and respect, and acknowledge from the get go we will have different perspectives and experiences.

Students will learn about the breadth and depth of American religious life, but they will also develop critical tools to examine the very meaning of the word “religion,” how it can be studied in the past and the present, and its dominant role in American cultural, social, and political history.

The class schedule includes reading assignments that are the backbone of the course, so instructors will regularly remind students about them, activities will often, but not always, be based on them, and grades will be determined by how well you demonstrate your knowledge of them.

Your final grade will be based on the following criteria. Each of the topics listed below will be discussed more fully during the semester. One of my primary objectives in the grading process is to make sure every student gets what she or he deserves--that is, the amount of work you put into the class will help determine your final grade in the course. Students will be asked to read a large amount of material, participate in both group discussions, provide recorded commentaries and presentations, and build a final project.

1. General participation (10 pts) Students will participate both in weekly live online class discussion and complete all the assigned video uploads

2. 4 quizzes (15 pts each): Throughout the course students will take short quizzes (10 multiple choice, one short essay response) based on reading assignments.

3. Group work (10 pts): Students will be assigned groups and will
have to arrange a time for the group to meet online and have a 20 minute conversation based on questions provided.

4. Final project (20 pts):
   Each student will come up with a final project for the class and report on the progress putting it together periodically throughout the term.

Schedule and Assignments

WEEK 1: Theoretical and Historical Orientations

1. Reading Assignment:
   - Albanese, “Introduction”
   - Laderman, “Introduction”
   - Stowe, “Introduction”

2. Find two media outlets to follow for religion in America stories

3. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online

4. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

WEEK 2: Religious Cultures at the Center

1. Reading Assignment:
   - Albanese, 255-270 (Public Protestantism and Civil Religion sections)
   - Laderman, American Civil Religion
   - Stowe, 41-63

2. First quiz

3. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online

4. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

WEEK 3: Protestantism Rules

1. Reading Assignment:
   - Albanese, 81-108; 109-133
   - Stowe, 17-40; 91-116
2. Upload your presentation of two current events

3. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online

4. Arrange and have online conversation with your group

5. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

**WEEK 4: African American Religious Cultures before the Civil War**

1. Reading Assignment:
   - Albanese, 134-142
   - Stowe, 91-116 (review)

2. Second quiz

3. Upload your presentation of two current events

4. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online

5. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

**WEEK 5: African American Religious Cultures after the Civil War**

1. Reading Assignment:
   - Albanese, 142-152
   - Stowe, 196-219; 272-292

2. Upload presentation of your initial plans for the final project

3. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online

4. Arrange and have online conversation with your group

5. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

**WEEK 6: Catholics in the New World**
1. Reading Assignment:
   - Albanese, 59-80
   - Leon, “Latina/o Borderland Religions,” in Cambridge History

2. Third quiz

3. Upload your presentation of two current events

4. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online

5. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

WEEK 7: Jewish American Religious Histories and Cultures

1. Reading Assignment:
   - Albanese, 40-58
   - Stowe, 171-195

2. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online

3. Upload your update for the final project

4. Arrange and have online conversation with your group

5. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

WEEK 8: Native Cultures and Religious Change

1. Reading Assignment:
   - Albanese, 19-39
   - Stowe, 117-145

2. Upload your responses to the written online discussion questions

3. **Upload your presentation of two current events

4. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online

5. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

WEEK 9: Religious Innovations, Spiritual Awakenings, and Metaphysical Traditions
1. Reading Assignment:
   - Albanese, 153-177; 178-198
   - Howe, 64-90

2. **Upload your update for the final project

3. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online

4. Arrange and have online conversation with your group

5. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

---

**WEEK 10: Global Religious Diversity Comes to America**

1. Reading Assignment:
   - Albanese, 199-226
   - Stowe, 146-170

2. Upload your response to written online discussion questions

3. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online

4. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

---

**WEEK 11: Muslims in America, the Long View**

1. Reading Assignment:
   - Rashid, “Muslim Voices in America: The Making of a Modern Music Scene
   - Moosa, “Post 9/11: America Agonizes over Islam”

2. Upload your presentation of two current events

3. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online

4. Arrange and have online conversation with your group

5. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

---

**WEEK 12: The 1960s and New Religious Frontiers**

1. Reading Assignment
Albanese, 227-253
Fenn, “Secularization in American Society”
Laderman, “The Rise of the Religious ‘Nones’ Indicates the End of the World as We Know It”

2. Fourth quiz
3. Upload your update for the final project
4. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online
5. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

WEEK 13: Cultural Religions and Popular Cultures

1. Reading Assignment:
   - Albanese, 271-280
   - Laderman, Sacred Matters, xiii-84
2. Upload your presentation of two current events
3. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online
4. Arrange and have online conversation with your group
5. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

WEEK 14: What is sacred?

1. Reading Assignment:
   - Laderman, 85-180
2. Review guided discussion activities and upload your video responses online
3. Participate in live class discussion at arranged time

WEEK 15: Concluding Thoughts

1. Final Report