HIS 523: Revival, Reform & War: Religion in America from the Revolution to the Civil War

Spring 2015

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Classroom: MHRA 1206
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Course description:

Upon my arrival in the United States, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention... In America, the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom were intimately united. Religion in America takes no direct art in the government, but nevertheless, it must be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions of that country—Alexis de Tocqueville, 1838.

In this course, students will explore the rapidly evolving religious environment of the early republic that so fascinated the Frenchman Tocqueville. His observations contain paradoxes that this class will strive to understand and explain. Americans became religious, but the government was not. Americans celebrated religious freedom, but used their faith to keep people in bondage. In this class, we will engage historiography and analyze primary documents to ask if American was founded as a Christian nation; to explore the reasons why evangelicalism spread so rapidly after the Revolution on both the frontier and in urban centers; to ponder why American faith could be simultaneously liberating and oppressive; to understand how Americans used their faith to reform national sins; and to examine abolitionist and proslavery theologies that undergirded the sectional crisis on the eve of the Civil War. In the process, you learn how religion—particular evangelical Christianity—has become central to the American national character.

Reading (the following books are required):


Other reading will be available as e-reserves or .pdfs on Canvas.

Optional:


**Learning Goals**

1. Students will understand and explain how Americans from diverse backgrounds acted to shape their own faiths and the religious outlook of the nation between the Revolution and the Civil War.
2. Students will discover, analyze, and interpret primary sources and engage with the current historiography of American religion, resulting in the development of original arguments in the form of class discussion and proposal for a research project.

**ASSESSMENT**

**PARTICIPATION:** This is a discussion-based class and I will not be lecturing. Our success, and your participation grade, will depend on your active engagement in discussions. You will need to have read and/or completed all assignments and prepared not only to discuss them, but to ask questions about things that are unclear or spark your curiosity, listen respectfully to your peers, articulate ways of understanding and talking about religion in American history, and synthesize interpretations from across the readings and assignments. If you read, talk, and generally engage, you will do well. If you show evidence that you have not read, and do not speak in class, you will not do well. **(40 percent)**

**RESEARCH PROPOSALS:** You will create a proposal for a major research paper that will include a historiographical review and précis of primary sources. This project will help familiarize you with the fundamentals of historical research, including the shaping of a research question, identification of useable and appropriate primary sources, location of your place in a historical argument, navigation of digital, library, and other bibliographic resources, and good writing and presentation. You will be required to submit drafts and different parts of this proposal and make regular reports to the class on your progress. Details to follow. **(30 percent)**

**REFLECTIONS:** Your will submit five reflections based on each unit of this class. Your reflections will be an engagement of the monograph at the center of each unit, informed by the additional reading materials and classroom discussions. They are not book reports, but critical engagement with the monograph in which you make
an evidence-based argument about the monograph’s thesis. These will be well-written and properly cited. *(30 percent)*

**SCHEDULE**
*(Subject to change)*

**UNIT 1: WAS AMERICAN FOUNDED AS A CHRISTIAN NATION?**

**WEEK 1**

**January 13:** Introduction to class and syllabus review

**January 15:** Overview of religion in America

*Fea, *Was American Founded?* Preface, Introduction, Part I*

**WEEK 2**

**January 20:** Colonial background


*George Whitefield*, Wikipedia

*Fea, *Was American Founded?* Chapter 5*

**January 22:** The Revolution

*Fea, *Was American Founded?* Chapter 6*

Documents, “Religion and Revolution” from Gaustad & Noll, 200-228. (Files)
WEEK 3

January 27

Fea, Was American Founded? Chapter 11-15

January 29

Fea, Was American Founded? Chapter 7-10, Conclusion

Reflection due

UNIT 2: AMERICAN GETS THE SPIRIT

WEEK 4

February 3

Amanda Porterfield, Conceived in Doubt, Introduction (e-reserves)


Hatch, The Democritization of American Christianity, Chapters 1-4

February 5

Hatch, The Democritization of American Christianity, Chapters 5-8

Research question due

WEEK 5

February 10

Roy Rogers, “After Democratization,” JuntoBlog

February 12

Documents on American revivalism. (Files)
(Paine, “The Age of Reason”
Stone, “Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery”
Alexander Campbell, “Christian System”
Bower, “Baptist Conversion”
Gilruth, “Methodist Circuit”
Susanna Anthony of Newport.
Peter Cartwright (Allitt, p. 130-133))

WEEK 6

February 17

Work day

February 19: NO CLASS

Reflection due

UNIT 3: WAS THE BENEVOLENT EMPIRE BENEVOLENT?

WEEK 7

February 24

Howe, What Hath God Wrought, Chapters 5 & 8 (Files)

February 26

Howe, What Hath God Wrought, Chapter 12 (Files)

WEEK 8

March 3

Documents on the Benevolent Empire (Noll & Gaustad, 304-327) (Files)
Phillip Schaff & Tocqueville (Allitt), Lyman Beecher on Dueling, ABS, ASSU, ATS, Livermore, Finney, New Lebanon (Files)

March 5

Grant Wacker, “Sojourners at Home.” (e-reserves)

WEEK 9: SPRING BREAK
WEEK 10

March 17

Documents (Noll & Gaustad, 328-351) (Files)

*Historiographical review due*

March 19

Work day

*Reflection due*

UNIT 4: FREEDOM AND BONDAGE

WEEK 11

March 24

Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, Introduction, Chapters 1-3

March 26

Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, Chapters 4-6, Epilogue

WEEK 12

March 31

Beth B. Schweiger, “Max Weber in Mount Airy,” (Files)
Charles Irons, review of *Ministers and Masters*, H-Net

April 2


*Primary source analysis due*
Week 13

April 7


April 9

Documents on southern religions (Files)
Thornwell and Stringfellow, Lilly, Meeting minutes (documents from Allitt, already scanned.)

*Reflection due*

UNIT 5: BROKEN CHURCHES

WEEK 14

April 14

Sean Scott, “Religion,” from *A Companion to the U.S. Civil War* (.pdf available through the e-book in library catalog.)

April 16

Documents on broken churches (Files)

WEEK 15

April 21

Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, Chapters 1-5

April 23

Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, Chapters 6-8

*Revised research proposal due*
WEEK 16

April 28

Work day

Reflection due
You will create a proposal for a research project that will include the following elements:

[DUE: February 5] Create a research question: Write a short description of a research topic, then construct a research question derived from that topic and explain how it satisfies our criteria for good research questions.

This will include a title, a brief description in about 3-4 well-written sentences that explains the general scope of the proposed research, and a penetrating research question. Explain how your research question satisfies the criteria for a good research question, including:

- What does it seek to explain?
- Is it specific?
- Is it feasible with regard to availability of primary source?
- Is it original?
- Is it penetrating?

This is a draft but you will make an effort at good writing and correct formatting. *Your research question will change as you delve more deeply into the historiography and primary sources.*

[DUE: March 17] Historiographical review: Create a bibliography with a historiographical review. You will consider at least two monographs and two scholarly articles that bear on your research proposal. Your review will address:

- What is the historiographical placement of the texts?
- What are the authors’s specific claims?
- How does the author support those claims?
- How will your work fit into the historiographical discussion?

[DUE: April 2] Primary source analysis: Create a primary source bibliography with a discussion of the primary sources you will employ. You must consider:

- Scope of the sources.
- Location of the sources.
- Analysis of the sources (author, points of view, etc.)
- Justification for use of the sources
- How the content will inform your inquiry.
- How this review shapes your original research question.
[DUE: April 23] Revised research proposal: This will be a revision of your original research question that will incorporate your historiographical discussion and primary source material into a larger narrative that includes, ultimately, a hypothesis.
PARTICIPATION RUBRIC

A: regularly active and constructive in classroom discussion
B: occasionally active in classroom discussion
C: rarely active in classroom discussions
D: does not participate in classroom discussion

REFLECTION RUBRIC

A: critically engages monograph with appropriate evidence; well written and formatted.
B: adequately engages monograph; use of limited evidence; less attention to good writing and formatting.
C: merely summarizes monograph; does not use evidence; little attention to good writing and formatting.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

_____ /5 points, research question
_____ /5 points, historiographical review
_____ /5 points, primary source analysis
_____ /10 points, final proposal

_____ /25 points

A: 21-25 points
B: 16-20 points
C: 10-15 points
D: <10 points