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RELS 251-01, Religion in America, Spring 1999

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Authors	Ingersoll, Julie
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Syllabus: RS 251 Religion in America, Spring 1999
MWF 9:10-10:10
Professor Julie Ingersoll
Office Hours in 110 Clough Hall, MWF 10:30-11:30 (and by appointment)

Course Description:

Traditionally, the study of religion in America has been organized around a "Protestant Narrative," tracing the rise and fall of mainline Protestantism as the central story. Recent scholarship has challenged this approach, arguing that the American religious scene has always been characterized by "free market" religious pluralism. These scholars argue that, rather than undermining religion, pluralism actually accounts for the persistent vitality of religion in America. And that, furthermore, religion itself only appears to be declining if we define "religion" in some very specific, and very narrow, ways.

This course will take the abundance of pluralism in America as its point of departure. We will begin with a book that lays out our theoretical framework and that traces the rise of pluralism since 1776. With this historical backdrop in place, we will then explore some of the many expressions of religious faith found in late twentieth century America. We must recognize, from the start, that we cannot even begin to cover the possibilities. In fact, our purpose will be to leave this semester with a sense of the vast diversity rather than a sense that we have basically "covered the material."

Required Texts:

The Churching of America, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark
Gatherings in Diaspora, R, Steven Warner and Judith Wittner, eds.
Martin and Malcolm in America, James Cone
Messiahs, Millenniums, and Mayhem, Thomas Robbins and Susan Palmer, eds.
God Gave Us the Right, Christel Manning

Course Requirements:

Instead of a mid term exam, students will write a three page critical review of each of the books we read. Critical reviews are more than "book reports," in that they supplement a brief summary of the thesis of the book with a more in depth assessment of that thesis, the theoretical underpinning of the book, and an argument about the significance of the book. You should address the ways in which this book adds to our discussion of the issues we are addressing in this class. I suggest you go to the library and look at some critical reviews in scholarly journals, to use as a model.

There will be a take home final exam that requires students to integrate all the books and material covered in class.

Each student will write an eight page paper on some aspect of American religion not covered in class and/or readings. The goal of this assignment is, in part, to allow you to explore some of the many traditions we will not have time to study as a class. Papers are to include adequate bibliography and citations (citation style will be at student discretion). An A paper will, among other things, have a thesis and an argument, and will be drawn from sources carefully assessed for their reliability and usefulness.

Students must participate in class on a daily basis but there will be time reserved at the end of the semester for a specific presentations of term paper research to be made by each student. Please spend time planning this presentation well. You will be graded on it and your classmates will appreciate a well organized, informative, session. These presentations, too, are intended to contribute to our "sampling" approach in this class.

Grading:

The grade of A is given for truly outstanding work. An assignment that receives an A will be excellent in all respects, including research, reasoning, creativity, and presentation.

An A-, B+, or B is given for above average work. Assignments that are excellent in some respects but need improvement in others will be assigned one of these above average grades.

B- represents average work that meets all the requirements of the assignment.

C+, C, C- will be assigned to work that meets most of the basic requirements but that falls short of those requirements in some important respect. Specific areas of concern include inadequate research or other preparation, poor reasoning, and/or weak writing.

D papers are those that are seriously inadequate but that have some redeeming qualities. Specific problems that might lead to such an assessment include poor research and writing, but most often have to do with issues relating to the student's failure to follow the assignment.

An F will be assigned to work that is fundamentally flawed, work that is in violation of the honor code (plagiarism or cheating), or work that is not turned in or that is turned in too late to receive credit.

Course Grades will be calculated as follows:

Average of 5 Critical Reviews 30%
Term Paper 30%
Final Exam 30%
Presentation 10%

Course Guidelines:

This course requires your meaningful and active participation. This means that you must come to class prepared for our discussion of the reading materials. Your grade will depend on it. When I say that you should be "prepared" for each class, I mean that you should have completed the assignments for the day and that you should have spent some time reflecting on those assignments and their significance for the issues we are discussing. Meaningful participation means that you engage constructively with the ideas presented in those readings, by me, and by your fellow students.

Class attendance is required. After four absences your final grade will **be reduced by 1/3 of a letter grade** for each additional absence. These first four absences are your "excused absences" (for illness, travel, job interviews, or watching *The Young and the Restless*). In other words, how you use them is up to you, you need not explain your choices to me. But if you use them unwisely, explanations for absences five, six, and seven are also unnecessary.

I reserve the right to adjust your final grade (up or down) based on your performance, attendance, preparedness, and so forth. When you must miss class, remember that it is your responsibility to check with me or your classmates to find out what you missed.

I rarely accept excuses for late work or schedule make up tests. If you encounter an unavoidable problem, see me as early as possible. The earlier I know about it the less it looks like poor planning and the more sympathetic I am likely to be. However, computer problems and the like are inevitable and you should plan for them. Grades on late papers will be reduced by 5 points for each twenty four hour period they are late.

Please take advantage of my office hours to get whatever help you need. Feel free to come by my office at other times as well; whenever I am there and the door is open you are welcome to drop in. If you cannot meet me at the times I have set aside, I will make arrangements to meet with you at another time. Just ask.

Finally, the Religious Studies Department has established the following inclusive language policy that applies to your work in this course:

In accordance with the editorial policy and practice with the majority of publications in our field, and consistent with the policy of the official Rhodes publications, the department of Religious Studies will require students in their written work to avoid the use of "man" (including also "men," "mankind," "family of man," "brotherhood," and the compounds "chairman," "clergyman," etc.) as a **generic** term and to use **inclusive** terms to designate both individuals and groups. [This applies to humans only and not to deity.]

Consistent with this policy, the pronoun "he" is not regarded as generic. Sound policy is to use appropriate pronouns when the antecedent is known. Recommended as a guide to good inclusive language style for both editor and author is the MLA Handbook.

Quotations are, of course, to represent the original exactly. Translations are to reflect, as precisely as possible, the translators' understanding of the original text with regard to gender.

Course Outline:

WED	1/13	Introduction to Course and Syllabus
I. The Rise of Pluralism in America		
FRI	1/15	READ: Finke and Stark 1-53
MON	1/18	NO CLASS, MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY
WED	1/20	READ: Finke and Stark 54-108
FRI	1/22	READ: Finke and Stark 109-144
MON	1/25	READ: Finke and Stark 145-198
WED	1/27	READ: Finke and Stark 199-236 [DISCUSS PROPOSALS]
FRI	1/29	READ: Finke and Stark 237-275 [FIRST REVIEW DUE IN CLASS]
II. African American Religion		
MON	2/1	READ: Cone 1-18
WED	2/3	READ: Cone 19-88
FRI	2/5	READ: Cone 89-119 [FORMAL PAPER PROPOSAL DUE]
MON	2/8	READ: Cone 120-180
WED	2/10	READ: Cone 181-212
FRI	2/12	READ: Cone 213-243
MON	2/15	READ: Cone 244-289
WED	2/17	READ: Cone 290-319 [SECOND REVIEW DUE IN CLASS]
III. Immigrant Religion		
FRI	2/19	READ: Warner TBA
MON	2/22	READ: Warner TBA
WED	2/24	READ: Warner TBA
FRI	2/26	READ: Warner TBA
MON	3/1	READ: Warner TBA
WED	3/3	READ: Warner TBA
FRI	3/5	READ: Warner TBA
MON	3/8	NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK
WED	3/10	NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK
FRI	3/12	NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK
MON	3/15	READ: Warner TBA
WED	3/17	READ: Warner TBA [THIRD REVIEW DUE]
IV. Women and Religion		
FRI	3/19	READ: Manning TBA

MON 3/22 **READ: Manning TBA**
WED 3/24 **READ: Manning TBA**
FRI 3/26 **READ: Manning TBA**

MON 3/29 **READ: Manning TBA**
WED 3/31 **READ: Manning TBA [FOURTH REVIEW DUE]**
FRI 4/2 NO CLASS, GOOD FRIDAY

V. Millennialist Movements

MON 4/5 **READ: Robbins/Palmer 1-46**
WED 4/7 **READ: Robbins/Palmer 47-72**
FRI 4/9 **READ: Robbins/Palmer 93-138**

MON 4/12 **READ: Robbins/Palmer 139-174**
WED 4/14 **READ: Robbins/Palmer 175-206**
FRI 4/16 **READ: Robbins/Palmer 207-246**

MON 4/19 **READ: Robbins/Palmer 247-284 [FIFTH REVIEW DUE]**

VI. Presentations

WED 4/21 Presentations [Term Papers Due]
FRI 4/23 Presentations

MON 4/26 Presentations
WED 4/28 Presentations
FRI 4/30 Presentations [Take Home Final Exams Due]