American Religious Texts
THEO 3375 L01
SUMMER SESSION II – 2017
1:00-4:00pm

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Office Hours:
Wednesdays 4:30-5:30 and by appointment

Course Summary:
This course addresses U.S. religious history through reading and analysis of a variety of popular and/or important texts from (roughly) the 1830s to the present. We will read these texts (and U.S. religions more generally) not in isolation from the worlds in which they took shape, but as the products of humans’ efforts to carve out meanings and assert control within particular social contexts. This course will also explore popular genres of film, television, and music as means to create, interpret, control, or expand religious meaning in the American context.

Readings include a variety of genres, including fiction, conversion narrative, theological argument, autobiography, and essay. We will also watch several films and listen to music in class together. We will model and practice thinking critically with visual and popular culture, asking what it reveals or conceals about religious practice and meaning in America.

Course Goals:
• Develop understanding of the contours of U.S. religious history from mid-19th century through the 20th century;
• Refine analytical tools for making sense of religious people and the discourses, objects, and relationships they produce;
• Enhance abilities to assess and explain religious idioms and their social and personal meanings;
• Critically engage visual and popular culture through the lens of religious studies;
• Improve skills in reading and analytical writing;
• Experiment with creative modes of expression as a means of personal and critical engagement with religious history.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS/ASSIGNMENTS

Class Participation (15%)
Attendance will be taken daily. Good participation includes: taking part in class discussion, active listening of lecture/discussion, commenting on assigned texts, offering constructive
advice to peers, asking questions, not violating class order. Your attendance and your active participation in class discussion are essential. You are expected to have done all the assigned reading for each class session and to come to class (with the readings in hand) having formulated specific questions and/or observations about the reading that you are ready to discuss. At the start of most class sessions we may also engage in brief writing exercises, mini quizzes, or small group conversation, all of which also constitutes part of your participation. Simply attending every class session with your printed readings will earn a grade of C+ – reflecting the average expectations for this category. Because this is a summer class with a condensed schedule, missing one class is the equivalent to missing an entire week during the regular semester.

Journal (15%)

➢ Each student in the course will keep a journal. The purpose of the journal assignment is 1) to enhance your engagement with and understanding the course material and 2) improve your writing. Six times during the semester each student will set aside one hour to write a journal entry. Each entry should have the date and time of entry indicated at the top. No more than two journal entries per week. These entries can take the form of 1) personal reflection 2) interpretive/analytical engagement with course materials.

➢ A total of six journal entries is required. At least three must be a sustained interpretive/analytical engagement with a course reading assignment. Examples of interpretive/analytical engagement include analysis of a key term from a text, a comparison of two texts to one another around some specific issue, or a close reading of a particular passage. Mark these entries “I/A.” Examples of personal reflection (max 3) entries include assessment of a conversation you had with someone, a short story, a fictional news item, a poem, creative response to a news item, or an introspective intellectual or personal observation clearly related to the course and the broader issues of religion in modern history. Be creative. Mark these entries “PR.”

➢ Exactly three journal entries should be stapled together and delivered in class on the day of the midterm review (July 19) and on the day of the final exam review (August 3) (all six entries stapled together). No late journals will be accepted.

Grading Criteria for Journal Assignment:

1) Form: Did student complete all assignments? Are assignments well-written? Do they adhere to proper style? Do they employ effective transitions between paragraphs? Do they witness to careful and deliberate preparation? Are dates and time spent on the entries clearly indicated? Are there proper citations to works discussed, summarized, or quoted? [Parenthetical citation is fine for course materials. For example, if this sentence quoted or referenced page five of Peter Manseau’s *One Nation, Under Gods*, you would end the sentence like this (Manseau 5). For other texts, use the Chicago Manual of Style (available online).]

2) Content: Do at least two entries treat our course reading assignments as required? Does the student thoughtfully engage course materials and treat specific issues thoroughly, given the one-hour time constraint? Does the student show increasingly
sophisticated integration of course material and an ability to think across our texts and themes? Has the student identified and tackled complex or subtle issues?

3) Creativity: How creative has the student been in the journal assignments? Does the student experiment with a variety of genres and approaches? Has the student shown a willingness to challenge himself or herself and to experiment? Do the journals witness to a purposeful struggle with the texts? Is the student making compelling connections to non-course material?

Film/Television Review (20%)
All students will write a 1000-word review of a film or television show that we did not watch in class. The review must situation the film and show in relation to broader themes about religious belief and practice as explored in our readings and class discussions. More instructions and further discussion of the assignment will be given in class.

Midterm Exam (25%)
There will be an in class, closed book essay exam on Thursday, July 20.

Final Exam (25%)
There will be an in class, closed book essay exam on Thursday, July 20.

CLASS POLICIES
Classroom Technology: It is well documented through controlled studies that people believe they are capable of multitasking more than they actually are. In order to reduce distractions and the need to toggle between the many demands in your life, laptops, tablets, smartphones, or any other means of accessing the wired, digital universe are not allowed in class. Students are expected to print out all readings and to take notes by hand. If this presents a serious financial or learning challenge, please speak to me privately.

Late Policy: An assignment’s grade will drop one full letter grade for every day that an assignment is overdue, such that a B paper will become a C. Extensions for written work will be granted only in exceptional circumstances (e.g. medial/family emergency, military service, religious observance). If you know you will need an extension, please contact me as soon as possible – do not wait until the day an assignment is due. No extensions are allowed for exams unless a formal extension is petitioned and granted by your Class Dean and in these rare cases a make-up exam will be arranged.

Academic Honesty: All papers and examinations must adhere to Fordham University’s policies regarding academic integrity (please see the Student Handbook). Any infractions of those policies will be subject to the sanctions listed there (a failing grade for any plagiarized assignments, a formal report of the incident submitted to the Dean, possible suspension from the course based on the Dean’s evaluation, and expulsion from Fordham if this is your second such offense at the university). Please talk with me if you have any questions or doubts about the academic integrity of any of your work.

ADA Notice: Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling
condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, course work, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Rose Hill – O’Hare Hall, Lower Level, x0655 or at Lincoln Center – Room 207, x6282).

**REQUIRED TEXTS**


*Please note: there are many other assigned readings that will be provided on Blackboard. All of these readings are marked with double asterisk (**) in the Schedule of Readings below.*

**Schedule of Readings/Assignments**

- **Wednesday, July 5:** course introductions; watching films religiously
  - READ (before class):
    - **John Leyden, Introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film***
    - Manseau, Introduction and Chapter 1, *One Nation, Under Gods*

- **Thursday, July 6:** Protestants, Puritans, Witches, and Wonders
  - WATCH (in class): *The Crucible* (Nicholas Hytner, 1996)
  - READ (before class):
    - **Cotton Mather, *Wonders of the Invisible World* (selections);**
    - Manseau, Chapter 3, 4, and 5, *One Nation, Under Gods*

- **Tuesday, July 11:** Indigenous Story-Telling
  - WATCH (in class): *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (Zacharias Kunuk, 2001)

- **Wednesday, July 12:** Interpreting stories
  - READ (before class):

- **Thursday, July 13:** Indians, Africans, and “Pagan” Religion
  - READ (before class):
    - Manseau, Chapters 6, 7, 8
    - **Debate between Jonathan Edwards and Charles Chauncy**
■ Tuesday, July 18: Christianity and Racist Violence
  ○ WATCH (in class): Birth of a Nation (Nate Parker, 2016)

■ Wednesday, July 19: Slavery, Freedom, and Religious Authority
  ○ READ (before class):
    ▪ **Jarena Lee, from “The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee” (1836) in African-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness
    ▪ **Rev. Fred A. Ross, from “Slavery Ordained of God” (1856-57)
    ▪ **Frederick Douglass, “Slave Holding Religion and the Christianity of Christ” from Narrative from the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave (1845)
    ▪ **Fr. Abram Joseph Ryan, “The Conquered Banner” (1865)
  ○ DUE: Journal Entries 1-3 Due (stapled together).

■ Thursday, July 20: MIDTERM EXAM (essay exam in class)

■ Tuesday, July 24: Nation of Islam
  ○ WATCH (in class): Malcolm X (Spike Lee, 1992)
  ○ READ (before class):

■ Wednesday, July 25: Black Religion and the Black Church
  ○ READ (before class):
    ▪ **James Cone, Black Power and Black Theology (selections)
    ▪ Manseau, chapter 11, One Nation, Under Gods
    ▪ **Dolores Williams, Sisters in the Wilderness (selections)
  ○ LISTEN (before class):
    ▪ Eric B. and Rakim, “Follow the Leader”;
    ▪ Public Enemy, “Fight the Power”;
    ▪ Brand Nubian, “Wake Up”;
    ▪ Kendrick Lamar “King Kunta”;
    ▪ Beyonce, “Formation”

■ Thursday, July 26: Jewish Modernities

■ Tuesday, August 1: Chosen and Choosing
  ○ READ (before class):
    ▪ **Lynn Davidman, Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism (selections)
    ▪ **Carolyn Moxley-Rouse, Engaged Surrender (selections)

■ Wednesday, August 2: Pentecostals and The Southern Gothic
  ○ READ (before class):
**Flannery O’Connor, selection of short stories from *Everything That Rises Must Converge***

**Jerry Falwell, *Listen, Americal* (selections)

- **LISTEN** (in class):

- **Thursday, August 3:** Power, Faith, and Authenticity
  - **WATCH** (in class): *The Apostle* (Robert Duvall, 1997)
  - **DUE:** Journal Entries 1-6 (stapled together) Due

- **Tuesday, August 8:** **FINAL EXAM** *(essay exam in class)*