Valarie Ziegler Course Syllabus

Prepared for the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture by:

Valarie Ziegler  
Department of Religious Studies  
Depauw University  
formerly of Rhodes College

The Center is pleased to share with you the syllabi for introductory courses in American religion that were developed in seminars led by Dr. Katherine Albanese of the University of California, Santa Barbara. In all of the seminar discussions, it was apparent that context, or the particular teaching setting, was an altogether critical factor in envisioning how students should be introduced to a field of study. The justification of approach, included with each syllabus, is thus germane to how you use the syllabus.

I. Syllabus Justification

American Religious History at Rhodes College is taught in the religious studies department under the rubric of a "Bible-related course." Under the terms of a lucrative grant from an Alabama foundation, all Rhodes students are required to take 4 religion courses: 2 in Bible, 2 in "Bible-related" topics. For these reasons, American Religious History functions as a church history/Christian theology course.

For me, American Religious History is the second half of a historical theology sequence. The first course is History of Christian Thought, in which my main goal is to convince students that there are (and have always been) a variety of Christian theological expressions. In the Bible Belt, that's not a thesis that students are inclined to accept. In American Religious History, I want to continue having students read theology (I think it's a good intellectual exercise) as well as to impress upon them the significance of social location for religious ideas and practices.

Because I work with students who are predominantly affluent white Southern cultural Christians, I hope to teach them to appreciate the social/political implications of "belonging to First Church." The best way I know to do that is to push them to study significant examples from their own history--the proslavery arguments, responses to the civil rights movement (I use Memphis Second Presbyterian Church as a case study)--as well as to learn something of the history of African Americans. I also try to pick Memphis/Rhodes examples when possible (such as the article on Benjamin Palmer, after whom our administration building is named; the reading on the presbytery trial of former college president Charles Diehl, who was accused of modernist heresies; an "Eyes on the Prize" film depicting the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis; a BBC production filmed in Memphis considering the conflict between the religion of the powerful and that of the powerless; class discussions of Elvis and of local Southern Baptist minister Nancy Hastings Sehested; and the article on AIDS and Memphis).

The longer I have taught this course, the more I have devoted attention to regional issues, mainly because students try to keep those concerns at a safe emotional distance. As a result, I now spend far less time than I originally did on topics outside mainstream Protestantism. That bucks the current trend toward multiculturalism--a trend that I support--but it seems to me that historical studies ought to make people more aware of their own place in history (no matter how much they resist). By choosing readings that
present students with problems in social ethics, at the same time that they pose questions of race, class, and
gender, I am doing my best to challenge students to discover and evaluate the implications of their own
social locations.

One of the goals of our department is to "make the strange familiar and the familiar strange." In classes like
the History of Christian Thought, where students spend much of the semester in the fourth century, my
emphasis is in making "strange" historical eras and debates seem comprehensible. In American Religious
History, I have decided to focus on the "familiar" in ways that will prompt students to see anew forms of
Christianity that they have heretofore taken for granted.

Other points: the course actually covers more topics than the reading list indicates (for example, nineteenth-
century utopian movements). My classes never have more than 20 students, and I concentrate on discussion
and analysis more than lecture, though I do provide students with significant information not covered by
their reading. I also spend a great deal of time trying to teach them how to write. I used to take students on
field trips, but through the years my zeal has flagged.

Finally: the issue of the text book. I've decided that students can read only so much material, and I would
rather have them concentrate on primary sources and a variety of secondary articles rather than one
secondary text. The Mathisen book is a nice collection of primary sources, but it is expensive. I am going to
try, for next time, to xerox as much as I can from ancient texts, and put together a Kinko's packet that will
bypass most copyright difficulties.

II. Course Syllabus

RELIGION 251. AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY
Fall, 1992
Rhodes College
Professor Valarie Ziegler

Welcome to American Religious History. Though no semester course could possibly cover all or even most
of the relevant issues, this course will introduce you to a variety of Christian expressions that have found
life in America. We will begin with a study of Native American and European antecedents and proceed to
an analysis of selected developments in American Christianity from the colonial period to the present. Two
of the themes that will guide our study will be theoretical. The first is a theological question: what did the
various groups and individuals believe? We will also ask a sociological question: in what ways did contact
with the larger culture affect beliefs, practices, and self-identities? To what extent did religionists seek to
shape their culture, and to what extent were they reflections of it? In addition to these theoretical questions,
we will give attention to two enduring issues of debate: the relationship of men and women and
the relationship of European Americans and African Americans within various Christian groups.

REQUIREMENTS

Your first requirement is to do the readings and to bring a copy of the assignment with you to class. This
course is not a lecture class, but a seminar affording you the opportunity to interact with one another, as
well as with historic texts. We will concentrate on developing reading skills that enhance your ability to
delineate and critique theological and historical arguments. Class participation will count ten per cent of
your final grade.

In addition to your assigned readings, I urge you as well to attend carefully to one of the survey texts on
reserve in the library. These books will give you a clearer sense of the larger cultural context underlying
our assigned readings. Particularly since a number of our readings deal with issues of regional and local
interest to Memphis, it is important for you to consult one of the survey texts. You may choose among: Peter Williams, America's Religions: Traditions and Cultures; Catherine Albanese, America: Religions and Religion; and Winthrop Hudson and John Corrigan, Religion in America.

There will be a midterm and a final exam. Each will count 25% of your final grade. Both will contain an essay section and a section requiring identification of quotations from the assigned readings.

One research paper (8-10 pages) worth 40% of your final grade will also be required.

The papers may discuss any aspect of American religious history; but they must involve significant work in primary sources as well as demonstrate a mastery of the relevant secondary literature. Since the paper is a major research project, we'll do a number of checks along the way to ensure that you are making satisfactory progress:

(1) On Tuesday, September 22, you will turn in a typed paper topic. Paper topics are due at the beginning of class; late topics will be penalized two points (per day), to be deducted from the final project grade. There is no grade for the topic itself.

(2) On Tuesday, October 6, you will turn in a short typed paper that will:

(a) state the thesis of your paper

(b) give a detailed outline demonstrating how you will argue your thesis

(c) include a complete bibliography of secondary and primary sources

This paper is due at the beginning of class; late papers will be penalized two points (per day), to be deducted from the final project grade.

Note: this short paper will not be graded; its purpose is to ensure that your thesis, methodology, and bibliography are appropriate. If your short paper is not satisfactory, you may rewrite it up to two times. The first rewrite is due on October 15; the second on October 27. Late papers will be penalized two points (per day), to be deducted from the final project grade. If you are unable to present a satisfactory short paper, you will not be permitted to submit a term paper. The official period for class withdrawals ends on October 30.

(3) On Thursday, November 17, you will turn in a draft of your paper. You should keep a copy of this draft for yourself as well. The draft is due at the beginning of class; late papers will be penalized two points (per day), to be deducted from the final project grade. I will not read that draft, but after you turn it in, I will ask you to read Strunk and White's Elements of Style. With Strunk and White in mind, you will revise your paper.

(4) The final draft is due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, December 1. Late papers will be penalized two points per day. When I grade your paper, I will evaluate it for the following:

- style: is the paper written in coherent, active-voice English? Do the sentences make sense, or are they confusing and wordy? Does the paper make proper use of paragraphs? Is the writing grammatically correct? Is the spelling correct? Strunk and White should help you with these issues.
- form: does the paper argue a thesis?
- scholarship: is the paper well researched? Does it know and cite the appropriate primary and secondary sources? Does it use proper form for the footnotes and the bibliography?
ATTENDANCE

Everyone is allowed three cuts. After that, you lose two points off your final grade for each absence. Being late for class (coming in after I close the door, but before 15 minutes has expired) counts as half an absence. Leaving early counts for half an absence. You are free to use your cuts for any reason—you don’t need to ask permission. If you are on an athletic team that will be out of town during class meetings, you may need to use your cuts for those purposes. No one is entitled to extra cuts because of participation in extracurricular activities.

REQUIRED TEXTS


Randall Balmer, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory (Oxford: 1989).

Nancy Hardesty, Women Called to Witness (Abingdon, 1984).


Levi Miller, Ben's Wayne (Good Books: 1989).

RECOMMENDED TEXT

Strunk and White, Elements of Style

COURSE OUTLINE

Thursday, August 27

Introduction to course

Tuesday, September 1

FILM: Black Robe


Thursday, September 3


Tuesday, September 8


Thursday, September 10


Tuesday, September 15


Thursday, September 17


HANDOUTS: --The Declaration of Independence


Tuesday, September 22

HARDESTY, pp. 26-85.


PAPER TOPICS DUE

Thursday, September 24


HANDOUTS: --David Walker, selections from "Walker's Appeal"

Tuesday, September 29

MIDTERM EXAM

Thursday, October 1 (1850),


FILM: "I Don't Want to Be Remembered as a Chair"

Tuesday, October 6

HARDESTY: pp. 86-127.

BALMER: "Camp Meeting," pp. 188-207.

HANDOUT: "Seneca Falls Declaration of Rights"

SHORT PAPER DUE

Thursday, October 8


--Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July" in Alice Moore Dunbar, ed., Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence, 1914, pp. 41-48.

Tuesday, October 13


--Julia Ward Howe, 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic

Thursday, October 15


REWRITE (IF NECESSARY) OF SHORT-PAPER DUE

FALL BREAK

Thursday, October 22


Tuesday, October 27


SECOND SHORT PAPER REWRITE (IF NECESSARY) DUE

Thursday, October 29

HANDOUT: Horace Bushnell, selections from "A Preliminary Dissertation on Language, "God In Christ (Brown and Parsons, 1849)

Tuesday, November 3


Thursday, November 5

Betty Deberg, Ungodly Women: Women and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism

Tuesday, November 10


--Reinhold Niebuhr, "Moralists and Politics"

Thursday, November 12

HANDOUTS: --Martin Luther King, Jr., selections from "Letter From a Birmingham Jail"


Documents from Second Presbyterian Church, Memphis

Tuesday, November 17

Levi Miller, Ben's Wayne

FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER DUE

Thursday, November 19


Tuesday, November 24


Tuesday, December 1

FILM: BBC and Mass Media, Sword and Spirit Series (1989): "The Last Shall Be First"

FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER DUE

Thursday, December 3


Tuesday, December 8

Concluding reflections