

**RELIG 254**  
**American Religion**  
**Winter 2012 / TTh 1:30-3:20 / Thomson 101 / 5 credits**

Instructor: Katie Corcoran

Office: Savery 270 – Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:30-1:30, Thursday 11:30-12:30 and by appointment, appointments are made through email.

Email:

TA: Kate Stockly-Meyerdirk

**Course Description**

Religions in the American context have been a source of offence, scandal and celebration. This course seeks to understand the history, background and tradition in its power to shape American culture, values, and politics. We will focus in particular on American Protestantism, its early hegemony, later fragmentation and new resurgence.

**Course Goals**

- To identify beliefs, rituals, and ways of thinking in the American religious traditions.
- To think critically and comparatively about and between each tradition.
- To apply a critical lens and reflect an articulate voice on the religious events in American religious culture.
- To prepare students to take on the role as scholars and informed citizens in the study of religion and in the understanding of American religious culture.

**Required Texts:**

Fischer, David Hackett. 1989. *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*. Oxford.

Himes, Andrew. 2011. *The Sword of the Lord: The Roots of Fundamentalism in an American Family*. Chiara Press.

Silk, Mark and Andrew Walsh. 2008. *One Nation, Divisible: How Regional Religious Differences Shape American Politics*. Rowman and Littlefield. 9780742558458.

Wellman, James K. 2008. *Evangelical vs. Liberal: The Class of Christian Cultures in the Pacific Northwest*. Oxford.

**Recommended, but Optional Text:**

Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. New Edition. Oxford. 9780195300475.

**Course Requirements:**

Students will write three short critical papers (double spaced; 12 font; due at the **beginning of the class**, for which they are assigned, **(50 points)**). Quiz section participation (and lecture participation when appropriate) **(20 points)**. There will be two identification in-class exams **(60 points)**. There are no make-up exams without a documented excuse. There will be a cumulative take home final that will be due Tuesday, March 13 at 10:00 a.m. at my office, Savery 270 **(70 points)**. There will be no exceptions to the date or time of drop off for this take

home final exam. As a part of the course, you will be required to attend one religious service from a list of congregations.

**All assigned work must be typed.**

All work is due on the assigned date at the assigned time unless the student can prove medical incompetence or personal catastrophe, which requires documentation. Otherwise late work will receive a 10 percent late penalty for every day it is late (the weekend counts as 2 days) and **turning in an assignment after class on the day it is due receives a one day late penalty.** I do not give “Incompletes.”

**To promote an environment conducive to learning,** please follow these classroom rules: NO food; NO cell phone calls or texting; Do NOT talk while your fellow students are asking questions or providing commentary; NO newspaper reading; if you cannot avoid coming late or leaving early, do so in a manner that does NOT disturb other students. It is recommended that you come to class on time and stay for the duration. Laptops can be used for taking notes only.

**Guide for Grading Writing:**

A 3.7 - 4.0 demonstrates not only passion and enthusiasm, but creative control of that energy and a consistent focus on the assignment; this means you have argued your point logically and creatively, and written clearly. A 3.5 is a diamond with a visible flaw, such as a problem in the writing style or a minor problem in the logic of the argument. A 3.3 to 3.0 is very good, but the argument is slightly flawed or the logic, grammar and writing are not as clear as they should be. A 2.0 to 2.5 communicates you tried but the argument is not fully developed and the writing is unclear.

**Specific Criteria for Evaluating Papers:**

- 1) The writing is articulate; including grammar, sentence structure and language.
- 2) The student has understood text well enough to be critical and analytical.
- 3) The student approaches the subject in an engaging and creative way.

**How to Write the Short Critical Assignments**

First, look at the Writing Tips sheets attached to the syllabus. Second, these papers must be precise—NO more than the page amount listed (anything longer will not be read). Third, they are *argumentative and NOT summaries* of the readings. Do not summarize; I already know what the readings say. I want your critical examination of the readings. An argumentative paper has these steps:

- 1) Choose a problem or a question that is focused, not too broad, but not too narrow.
- 2) Write a thesis, which is your focused argument in the first paragraph. This is not your opinion but a statement of your argument about the problem or question.
- 3) Then, argue for your thesis with two or three points concisely made—include evidence from the writings to make your point more plausible.
- 4) The best papers often include counter-argument—that is a counter to your main thesis, to which you respond. The final paragraph is a summary paragraph, which summarizes your point—it does not include a new argument. Occasionally, your

counter-point is insurmountable, and you change your mind in response to it—allow this to happen—this can be interesting and creative.

- 5) One caveat: Do not be afraid to differ with me... I will grade on the plausibility of your arguments.

### **Grading Philosophy:**

The course is taught to mastery. That is, if you master the material and express your ideas in a clear, critical and creative way you can attain a very good score. I will pass out a numerical grading guide that will correspond to the total possible points of 200.

### **Academic Conduct**

I will strictly enforce the University of Washington Student Conduct code, including the policy on plagiarism. For your reference, the entire code can be found at <http://www.washington.edu/students/handbook/conduct.html>.

### **Disabled Students**

If you would like to request accommodations due to a disability, please contact Disabled Student Services, 448 Schmitz Hall, 543-8924 (V/TDD). If you have a letter from Disabled Student Services indicating you require accommodations, please present the letter to me as soon as possible so that I can make necessary arrangements.

### **Course Outline and Reading Assignments: American Religion**

#### **1. Introduction to the Study of American Religion and Culture**

Tuesday, 1/3 Organizational Session and the Question of Religion and American Culture

#### **2. American Religious Folkways**

In the Albion text, focus in each chapter on "religious origins" and these 'ways': religion, death, magic, learning, wealth, rank, social, order, power and freedom.

Thursday, 1/5 Reading Assignment: Fischer, pp. 7-11, 18-24, 111-134, 166-180, 189-205.

Tuesday, 1/10 Reading Assignment: Fischer, pp. 232-236, 326-348, 374-389, 398-418.

Thursday, 1/12 Reading Assignment: Fischer, pp. 424-429, 517-538, 566-577, 584-603.

Tuesday, 1/17 Reading Assignment: Fischer, pp. 605-618, 697-727, 747-758, 765-782.

Thursday, 1/19 Movie: *Black Robe*

**Short Paper Assignment #1:** 3-4 page paper on comparing/contrasting how the last two groups' understanding of the relationship of religion and freedom is different from the first two. **(20 points)**

### **3. Roots of Fundamentalism**

Tuesday, 1/24 Reading Assignment: Himes, pp. 2-73

Guest Lecture by Himes. Bring at least one typed, thoughtful question on the reading. Leave room to write others down during the lecture. These will be turned in.

Thursday, 1/26 Reading Assignment: Himes, pp. 73-128

Tuesday, 1/31 Reading Assignment: Himes, pp. 128-174

Thursday, 2/2 Reading Assignment: Himes, pp. 174-230

Tuesday, 2/7 Reading Assignment: Himes, pp. 231-291

Thursday, 2/9 **In Class ID Exam #1**

**No section on Friday 2/10.**

### **4. American Religious Subcultures**

Tuesday, 2/14 Reading Assignment: Silk, pp. 1-62

Thursday, 2/16 Reading Assignment: Silk, pp. 63-134

Tuesday, 2/21 Reading Assignment: Silk, pp. 135-180

Thursday, 2/23 Reading Assignment: Silk, pp. 181-228

**Short Paper Assignment #2:** Two page paper using Silk's book, choose two regions and compare/contrast them based on one characteristic. **(10 points)**

**No section on Friday 2/24.**

### **5. The Clash of Christian Cultures in the Pacific Northwest**

Tuesday, 2/28 Reading Assignment: Wellman, pp. 11-19, 59-87, 217-234

Thursday, 3/1 Reading Assignment: Wellman, pp. 127-188

Tuesday, 3/6 Reading Assignment: Wellman, pp. 235-284

**Short Paper Assignment #3:** Three page paper using Wellman's book, compare/contrast the religious service you attended with Wellman's description of Evangelical and/or Liberal Christians. **(20 points)**

Thursday, 3/8 **In Class ID Exam #2**

**FINAL EXAM DUE**, Tuesday, March 13 at 10:00 a.m.; my office, Savery 270

**Grading Scale:**

“A” Range:

$$196 - >200 = 4.0$$

$$192 - 195 = 3.9$$

$$190 - 191 = 3.8$$

$$186 - 189 = 3.7$$

$$183 - 185 = 3.6$$

$$180 - 182 = 3.5$$

“B” Range:

$$176 - 179 = 3.4$$

$$171 - 175 = 3.3$$

$$167 - 170 = 3.2$$

$$163 - 166 = 3.1$$

$$160 - 162 = 3.0$$

$$158 = 2.9$$

$$156 = 2.8$$

$$154 = 2.7$$

$$152 = 2.6$$

$$150 = 2.5$$

“C” Range:

$$148 = 2.4$$

$$146 = 2.3$$

$$144 = 2.2$$

$$142 = 2.1$$

$$140 = 2.0$$

$$138 = 1.9$$

$$136 = 1.8$$

$$134 = 1.7$$

$$132 = 1.6$$

$$130 = 1.5$$

“D” Range:

$$128 = 1.4$$

$$126 = 1.3$$

$$124 = 1.2$$

$$122 = 1.1$$

$$120 = 1.0$$

$$118 = 0.9$$

$$116 = 0.8$$

$$114 = 0.7$$

$$<57 = 0.0$$