

American Religions and the Tradition of Dissent
an undergraduate course

Hannah Scheidt
[contact information]

Course Description:

This course is appropriate for any undergraduate looking to gain an introductory knowledge of American Religious history. Religion plays a central role in American history, but it is too often overlooked. Religion appears in historical narratives only shallowly and occasionally; this is what historian Jon Butler calls the "Jack-in-the-box effect." In this course, we study the religious characters, ideas, institutions, and themes that contribute to and shape American history and that continue to shape contemporary American society. That said, the course attempts to give an honest sense of the diverse scope of religious identities in the United States, to introduce students to the basics of these traditions, and to accurately place them (both historically and sociologically) in the American context. As the title "American Religions and the Tradition of Dissent" implies, this class assumes a distinct angle on the topic. Course readings and lectures will productively challenge a central paradigm of American religion that exists both in popular ideology and in the academy – that is, the centrality of the Protestant mainstream and a convincing and digestible "civil religion." What emerges through this approach is a much richer and more complex (though often wrought with strife) pluralistic American religious scene.

Course Objectives:

This course seeks to provide students with a working knowledge of the myriad religious traditions in American history, from "imported" religions to "homegrown" ones. It also, importantly, aims to help students understand the pivotal role of dissent in American culture. What is religious dissent? How does it overlap with and interact with political dissent? How and when is dissent productive, and when does it "seem to go nowhere?" Can traditions that begin with dissent eventually become mainstream? How is dissent special in the American context? What story does this perspective (consensus vs. dissensus) give us that we might not otherwise have access to? Finally, this course will help students recognize religious implications in ideas and movements that they might not have immediately or "traditionally" recognized as religious. As with any undergraduate course in religious studies, I expect to challenge how students think about religion in general and how they see religion operating (or how they do not see it) in private and public life.

Through this course, student will gain:

- basic knowledge of the many diverse religious traditions in the United States.
- an understanding of the religious tension that has always characterized American society.
- an understanding of the role of *dissent* in American religious history and, accordingly, in American history in general.
- a broader understanding of "religion" that might help them identify non-traditional movements as nonetheless "religious."
- a better understanding of the country's *current* social and religious climate.
- an introduction to academic religious studies.
- experience reading thoroughly and writing engaging syntheses at the college level.

Course Layout and Format:

This course is built thematically rather than chronologically. The first two weeks are dedicated to better understanding the consensus narrative that we seek to complicate. After that, the course focuses on "dissent and dissenters." Within this large framework, the "dissent" portion of the class mirrors Edwin Scott Gaustad's short book, *Dissent in American Religion*. This book provides a brief introduction to dissent in the American context and divides religious dissenters into three main categories: schismatics, heretics, and misfits (parts II, III, and IV of the course, respectively). A thematic organization like this allows us to juxtapose traditions that would not otherwise seem connected; it also provides a dynamic picture of the many forces at work in the ever-changing American religious scene. It helps us understand the role of dissent and, to some extent, the often-overlooked dimension of power and religious influence.

Class time will be divided between lecture and discussion. Short response papers throughout the quarter help students start to synthesize the readings, draw relevant connections from observations or from other classes, and start to explore any ideas that they are particularly interested in. Students write a short midterm (5-7 pgs) in which they are encouraged to start to develop ideas for their final paper (10-12 pgs). Topics are open, but one suggested option is to select a primary source document that conveys dissent, to contextualize the text, and to explore its significance.

Course Standards, Policies, & Requirements

Attendance and Preparedness

25%

Attendance is required. Students are requested to notify me as soon as possible should they foresee needing to miss a class for extenuating circumstances. Absences are dealt with according to the situation, but unexcused or explained absences will directly affect the participation grade (5% for every missed class). Lateness is frowned upon; expect to experience a stink-eye the likes of which will make your skin crawl. Excessive and/or repeated lateness will result in uncomfortable conversations and will start to affect your grade like absences. Finally, students are expected to have completed assigned readings for every class, and should come to class with relevant questions or comments in mind so as to be able to engage and should we have in discussion time.

Short Response Papers

25%

There are ten weeks in the quarter, and students are asked to submit five thoughtful 1-2 page responses throughout the quarter. One should be submitted on or before January 17 (the last day of Part I of the class). This can be a valuable opportunity to explore any materials or concepts that students might want to develop later; it also lets me know that students are reading critically and thoughtfully. Each response is worth 5% of this portion of the grade.

Midterm Paper

20%

The midterm is a 5-7 page (double-spaced, 12-pt font) academic paper in which students explore a group, practice, or idea that we have touched on in class. The midterm may lead into the final. The midterm is due by 5 pm on February 8.

Final Paper

30%

The final will be 10-12 pages, due by March 21. Students are welcome (and encouraged) to meet with me to explore and discuss topics. As mentioned above, one suggested route is to choose a primary source document, to contextualize the text, and to explore its significance

Due dates and times are firm; papers will only be accepted late if students have discussed circumstances prior with me.

Academic Integrity

Students must comply with the University's regulations regarding academic honesty; if you are unsure as to what these standards are, please consult the student handbook/website or speak with the instructor prior to completion of assignments. The minimum penalty for academic dishonesty will be loss of credit on the assignment.

Overview of Grading

Class Participation and Preparedness	25%
Short Response Papers (5)	25%
Midterm Paper (5-7 pgs)	20%
Final Paper (10-12 pgs)	30%

Course Materials

Required Texts

Gaustad, Edwin S. (2006). *Dissent in American Religion* (Rev. ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Note: This book is the backbone of the class, so to speak. We will be reading it in parts to guide us through Parts II, III, and IV. In addition, it has a helpful timeline of important events at the end – this will be particularly useful as the class is not strictly chronological. Finally, the suggested readings list is a valuable resource for thinking about papers.

Albanese, Catherine L. (2013). *America: Religions and Religion*. Australia; Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.

Williams, Peter. (2008). *America's Religions*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Course Schedule

Class 1 Introduction to the course and the topic

- Introduction, pgs. 1-13, Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*

Part One: Consensus & The Mainstream

Class 2 A Christian Nation

- Prologue and "Christendom and American Origins" pgs. 7-28, George Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*
- The Myth of the Christian Nation, pgs. 66-79, Richard Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*
- (Optional) "'Okay Axis, Here We Come' Captain American and the Superhero Teams from WWII and the Cold War" Robert Weiner, in *The Gospel According to Superheroes*, ed. B.J. Oropeza (2005).

Week 2:

Class 1 The Mainstream and Civil Religion

- "Chapter 11: The Public, the Civil, and the Culture of the Center", Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*
- "'Mainline' Protestantism in the Later Twentieth Century," Peter Williams, *America's Religions*

Class 2 The Mainstream and Civil Religion, cont.

- "Civil Religion in America," Robert N. Bellah, *Dædalus* (1967), Vol. 96, No. 1, pp. 1-21.
- Gallup Poll: Atheists, Muslims See Most Bias as Presidential Candidates <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/155285/Atheists-Muslims-Bias-Presidential-Candidates.aspx>>

Part Two: Dissent in American Religion - Schism

Week 3:

Class 1 Introduction to Dissent and "The Schismatics"

- "What is Dissent," from Ralph Young, *Dissent in America* (2008)
- Prologue and "The Schismatics," Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion*

Class 2 Methodism and Baptism

- John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism
- The Great Awakening and the Baptist Tradition
- The Anabaptists and Pietists in Pennsylvania
-all in Peter Williams, *America's Religions*

Week 4:

Class 1 Evangelicalism Evolves

- White Evangelicalism, pgs. 183-209
- Victorian Evangelicals
- Conservative Protestantism: Culture and Politics
-all in Williams, *America's Religions*

Class 2 Ethnic and Racial Schism

- Black Center, pgs. 134-147, Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*
- Religion in the South
- Catholicism: From Ethnic Pluralism to Institutional Unity
- Eastern Christianity in America
- Ethnic Diversity and Denominationalism in American Judaism
-all in Peter Williams, *America's Religions*
- (Optional) "Religious Participation of Korean Immigrants in the United States," Won Moo Hurh & Kwang Chung Kim, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1990), 29:1, pp. 19-34.

Part Three: Dissent in American Religion - Heretics

Week 4

Class 1

Heretics: The School of Reason

- The Heretics: A Reasonable World, pgs. 41-49, Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion*
- The Origins of Modern Religious Liberalism, pgs. 150-155, Peter Williams, *America's Religions*
- Thomas Paine, The Age of Reason, Part 1

Class 2

Heretics: The Romantic School

- The Heretics: A Romantic World, pgs 49-58, Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion*
- *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, Part III, Margaret Fuller
- *Self-Reliance* [excerpts] and *Nature* [excerpts], Ralph Waldo Emerson

Midterm Paper Due By Feb 8 at 5 pm

Week 5

Class 1

Heretics: The Scientific School

- The Heretics: A Scientific World, pgs 58-70, Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion*
- "The Warfare of Science and Religion," Edward Arthur White, *Science and Religion in American Thought: The Impact of Naturalism*
- (Optional) "When Religion Steps on Science's Turf," Richard Dawkins, *Free Inquiry Magazine* 18:2.
- (Optional) "The Atom" lyrics, Ani DiFranco

Class 2

Humanists and Skeptics

- The Heretics: Humanists and Skeptics, pgs 70-84, Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion*
- Humanism and African Americans for Humanism, pgs 157-185, Anthony Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*
- "The Faith of a Heretic," Walter Kaufmann

Part Four: Dissent in American Religion - Misfits

Week 6

Class 1

Native Americans

- "The Misfits: The Destroyed," pgs. 85-92, Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion*
- "Original Manyess: Tradition and Change among Native Americans," Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*

Class 2

The Exiled

- "The Misfits: The Exiled," pgs. 92-100, Gaustad

- "Full Liberty in Religious Concernments': Rhode Island," Gaustad & Schmidt, *The Religious History of American*
- "Israel in a Promised Land: Jewish Religion and Peoplehood," Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*
- "The Mormons," pgs. 157-161 Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*

Week 7

Class 1

The Feared: African Americans and Black Nationalism

- "The Misfits: The Feared," pgs. 100-111, Gaustad
- "Black Nationalism and New Urban Religions," Peter Williams, *America's Religions*
- "Speech to the Universal Negro Improvement Association," Marcus Garvey

Class 2

The Feared: Catholics

- "Bread and Mortar: The Presence of Roman Catholicism," Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*
- "Vatican II and the End of the Catholic 'Ghetto'" & "Roman Catholic Education, Thought, and Culture," Peter Williams, *America's Religions*
- "The Know-Nothings: American Party Platform"

Week 8

Class 1

The Ridiculed & Sentimentalized

- "The Misfits: Ridiculed" pgs. 111-120, Gaustad
- Chapter 7: "Visions of Paradise Planted: Nineteenth-Century New Religions" Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*

Class 2

The Patronized and Sentimentalized

- "The Misfits: The Patronized and Sentimentalized" pgs. 120-141, Gaustad
- Chapter 9: "East Is West" pgs. 206-224, Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*
- Chapter 19: "Anabaptists and Pietists in Pennsylvania" Peter Williams, *America's Religions*

Week 9

Class 1

New Directions: The Beat Generation, New Age, Seekers

- "New Directions in Religious Dissent," Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion*
- "Patterns of Contemporary Expansion," pgs. 227-239, Catherine Albanese
- Allen Ginsberg, "America"

Class 2

New Directions: Church Shopping and Hopping, Self-Making

- Chapter Five: "The Bible Tells me so (I think): Recent Trends in Religious Beliefs," Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*

- Chapter Six: "Spirituality and Spiritual Practices: The Role of Faith in Personal Life," Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*
- *The Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster*, pgs. 1-29, Bobby Henderson.
- (Optional) "But is there Intelligent Spaghetti Out There?" by Sarah Boxer, *The New York Times*, (2005).

Final Papers due Thursday, March 21 at 5 pm