I. Course Overview

This course explores religious life in the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Comprehensive coverage of such a diverse landscape is not our goal. Rather, we will focus on some of the basic social categories that organize our society and that make religion a social phenomenon. How do religious belief and practice relate to race, class, or gender? How do we understand the role of religion in politics or in public life? We will survey case studies from a wide range of times and places, in order to develop a comparative perspective on the many ways of being religious that constitute this nation. Some of our case studies appear distinctly countercultural, while others have markedly shaped the development of American culture, politics, and national identity. Taken together, these cases begin to illustrate the dynamism, contentiousness, and multiplicity of American religious identity.

Major themes include religion and race; the effects of urbanization, industrialization and immigration; religion, class, and region; evangelicalism and the religious right; religion and gender; religion and social action; and the enduring challenges of religious multiplicity in the U.S. The chief aims of the course are: 1) to acquire knowledge of the disparate religions practiced in North America during the twentieth century and beyond; 2) to examine some of the chief conflicts as well as alliances between religion and the American social order; and 3) to develop interpretive tools for understanding religion’s present and enduring role in the U.S. and the world. You will encounter persons of diverse and complex religious persuasions throughout your life, and this course should equip you with important resources for understanding these manifold affiliations.

Discussions will aim at helping students speak cogently about the impact of religious people, practices, and ideas upon a diverse society (and vice versa). Grades will measure the effectiveness of textual interpretation and critical thinking as well as students’ ability to place specific religious developments within broader social, intellectual, and political contexts.

II. Resources:
Every week we will have a reading assignment for the class. We ask that you complete this BEFORE class that week; this will greatly help you engage in the discussions with your classmates. All readings are available on the course Blackboard website.

III. Course Assignments:
The most important assignments for this course are to attend class regularly, do the reading, and participate in discussion. Given the importance of in-class discussions, ALL students are expected to go beyond the role of the “active observer” and merely attending lecture/discussions.
Rather, students must work towards critical engagement with their peers and the instructor. Therefore, it is imperative that students complete assigned readings on time and come to class ready to critically engage the subject matter and share their reflections and insights. Each student will be evaluated according to how they contribute to a dynamic and engaging learning environment. Therefore, this portion of the student’s grade will assess how well you prepare for each class meeting (i.e. staying on top of assigned readings) and most importantly, how your contribution to each class discussion displays informed and thoughtful engagement (not necessarily a quantity of comments) with course materials and concepts. It might help you to think about the evaluation of your class participation as comprised of Attendance, Attention, and Articulation.

Several themes discussed throughout the course can possibly foster controversial conversations and give rise to deeply personal experiences. Each person is entitled to their respective views, however, as a collective unit it is important that we maintain an environment grounded in respect, tolerance, and sensitivity to each person’s view and opinions. The class environment is an intimate, vulnerable, and personal space where students are constantly asked to share opinions. Students and instructors must show respect for one another at all times. You may not agree with another’s position, you may not even respect some of the viewpoints offered by others, but you must respect the person as a contributing member of the class. Given a pedagogical commitment to establishing an active learning environment, you are encouraged to be flexible as you engage one another; that is to say, give your peers space and opportunity to wrestle with their responses.

In addition, you will be graded on the following:

- **Class Participation**: 10%
- **Short essay 1 (max 1500 words)**: 20%
- **Mid-term Exam**: 25%
- **Reading Blog**: 20%
- **Final Take-home exam**: 25%

**Due dates:**
- Short essay **Sep 30**
  *This essay will be a response to the readings on race and religion in the first month of the course.*
- Mid-term **Oct 31**
- Reading Blog **Nov 30**
  *Throughout the semester, you will keep a Reading Blog on Blackboard, where you will record your reflections about our assigned readings on a weekly basis. The blog should be at least 250 words/week, and should include a response to the readings: what do you have questions about? What confused or interested you? What annoyed or excited you? Late in the semester, you will submit a Blog Portfolio containing the 4 entries you consider your best blog entries from the course. Weekly submissions will be recorded but not graded; final portfolio will be graded. They are **due by 5 pm the day before** we are scheduled to discuss the relevant reading (either Sunday or Tuesday).*
- Final exam **Dec 14**
**Late assignments will incur a penalty of 1/3 grade per day unless approved in advance or accompanied by a medical excuse**

IV. Weekly Schedule

A. Introductions and Definitions

Aug 29  Who are Americans? Where and what is religion?

Aug 31  Historical Overview of Religion in Public Life  
**Reading:** Robert Putnam, *American Grace*, ch. 1

Sep 5  Labor Day—no classes

Sep 7  Two views of U.S. religion  
**Reading:** Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, “Principal Causes which render religion powerful in America”; R. Laurence Moore, “Controversies about the public display of religion”

B. Religion and Race

Sep 12  Race and Religion: Aftermath of freedom  
**Reading:** Albert J. Raboteau, “Relating Race and Religion”

Sep 14  The Christian Church and the legacy of slavery  
**Reading:** Benjamin Mays, “The Church and Race”

Sep 19  Urbanization and Migration  
**Reading:** RL Moore, “The African Future of Christianity”

Sep 21  Civil Rights from the ground up  
**Reading:** Charles Marsh, *God’s Long Summer*, excerpt

C. Urbanization, Industrialization, Immigration

Sep 26  Inner-city Faith and religious realism  
**Reading:** Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, excerpts

Sep 28  The Catholic Social Worker movement  
**Reading:** Dorothy Day, “Love is the Measure”

Sep 30  Short essay due by 5pm
Oct 3  Historical survey of American immigration
Reading: RL Moore, “Immigrant Religion and the Right to be Different”

Oct 5  Judaism: The Second and Third Generations
Reading: Deborah Dash Moore, To the Golden Cities, chs. 1, 8, 9

Oct 8  Pre-debate event with Eboo Patel et al; information available here. NB: You will receive extra credit for attending this event and submitting a blog entry about it (due Oct. 12 by 5 pm).

Oct 9  Presidential Debate at Wash U. NB: You will receive extra credit for watching this event and submitting a blog entry about it (due Oct. 12 by 5 pm).

Oct 10 Return to Tradition
Reading: Lynn Davidman, Tradition in a Rootless World, chs. 1, 6

Oct 12  Yom Kippur—No Class

Oct 17  Fall Break—No class

Oct 19  Catholic immigration and changing traditions
Reading: Mary McCarthy, Memoirs of a Catholic Girlhood; Richard Rodriguez, Hunger of Memory

D. Religion, Class, and Region

Oct 24  Appalachian Religion
Reading: Richard Callahan, Work and Faith in the Kentucky Coalfields, ch. 1

Oct 26  Snake-Handling and other Mountain Customs
Reading: Dennis Covington, Salvation on Sand Mountain, chs. 1, 8

Oct 31  No class: Take Home Exam due today by 5 pm

E. Evangelicals, Prosperity and the Religious Right

Nov 2  A brief history of evangelicals in the U.S.
Reading: RL Moore, “Evangelizing the World in this generation”

Nov 7  Prosperity and the Megachurches
Reading: Kate Bowler, Blessed, ch. 5, “Victory”

Nov 9  Evangelicalism and Gender
Reading: R. Marie Griffith, “Submissive Wives, Wounded Daughters, and Female Soldiers”
F. Religion and Social Action

Nov 14  Hopeful Pluralism  
**Reading:** Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith*, excerpts

Nov 16  Dream or a Nightmare?  
**Reading:** Ta-Nahisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

Nov 21  No class

Nov 23  Thanksgiving Break—No class

Nov 28  Contested Topics in Religious Life  
**Reading:** Miscellaneous newspaper articles

Nov 30  Immigration, Terrorism, or Happy Pluralism?  
**Reading:** “Letter from Maine: New in Town”

**Reading blog portfolio due at 5 pm**

Dec 5  Matters of Religious Freedom  
**Reading:** TBA

Dec 7  Summaries and Conclusions

****Take Home Final Exam due by 5 pm, December 14****