

Dr. Tammy Van Dyken
Summer 2019
Any time by appointment

Office: Cherry Hall 240A
tamara.vandyken@wku.edu

HISTORY OF RELIGION IN AMERICA

Upon my arrival in the United States, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention...In France I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom pursuing courses diametrically opposed to each other; but in America I found that they were intimately united, and that they reigned in common over the same country.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835)

In his travels through the United States, Alexis de Tocqueville was intrigued by the unique expression of religiosity found in the young nation. Contrasted with Europe, nineteenth-century America was, in de Tocqueville's estimation, a land where citizens easily blended the "spirit of religion" with the "spirit of freedom" to create an exceptional form of civic religion. Whether de Tocqueville's assessment was accurate or not, successive generations of Americans have continued to develop, debate, and denounce the place of religion in American politics, culture, and society. Exactly how religion evolved in America and how Americans have understood and contested the interplay of "the spirit of religion" and "the spirit of freedom" will be a primary focus of this class

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To understand and appreciate the development of various forms of religion and religious practice in America
- To assess the role of religion in American identity and exceptionalism—in politics, society, and culture
- To analyze the ways in which the American context shaped particular forms of religion and religious practice, forms that were both entirely new as well as those rooted in earlier traditions
- To locate and appreciate one's own historical roots within the span of American religion

REQUIRED BOOKS

John Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation: A Historical Introduction*.
John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*.
Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature*.
Paul M. Barrett, *American Islam: The Struggle for the Soul of a Religion*.
Laurel Thatcher-Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Weekly Assignments

Each week, you will be asked to read one book relating to the history of religion in America and engage with the issue presented by the author in a variety of forms. These forms include: submitting a book review, posting a thoughtful original post on the online discussion board, and respectfully responding to a classmate's post on the discussion board. Both the reviews and posted responses should incorporate references to the readings through page numbers and brief direct quotes (eg. one sentence) and use this evidence from the sources to support a historical analysis and response to the topic.

Discussion Boards

You are required to post **two** responses to the Blackboard discussion board over the course of the week. Both posts should be based on evidence from the reading, and there will be penalties for late submissions.

- The first post should consist of three or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and address at least one of the questions from the reading response form. Your first post is due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday of each week, but you may post as early as you like.
- The second post should consist of two or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and should engage with the posts others in the class submitted. Your second post is due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Sunday of each week. You must post at least one response to a classmate in order to receive full credit, but you may respond as many times as you like.

Book Reviews

You will be required to read six historical monographs and write reviews analyzing each of the required books.

- The reviews must evaluate and explain the main argument of the book, describe the sources used by the author in developing the argument, discuss why the argument is important to understanding religion in America, and assess the strengths and weaknesses of this argument.
- Each review must be 2-4 pages typed, double-spaced, and following the form of ChicagoStyle/Turabian style for historical writing. Your review is due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Friday of each week.

Final Paper

Each student will be required to hand in a 10-15 page typed, double-space paper that provides a historiographical analysis of the state of American religious history and potential avenues for exploration in the field. I will provide you with various scholarly articles to read that will provide the basis of your synthesis and analysis. The final paper must follow Chicago Style/Turabian format and is due no later than 9:00 p.m on Friday, June 21.

Disabilities

In compliance with university policy, students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Student Disability Services in Downing University Center A-200. The phone number is 745-5004; TTY is 745-3030. Per university policy, please DO NOT request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a letter of accommodation from the OFSDS.

Academic Honesty

Everyone in this class is expected to conduct themselves in conjunction with WKU's policy of academic integrity. This means that cheating on assignments (through either giving or receiving aid), and plagiarizing assignments and/or papers (through representing the work of others as your own without proper citations or using your own work in more than one class without the permission of the instructors) will not be tolerated. Student work may be checked by plagiarism detection software in order to prevent such actions. Cheating or plagiarism can result in a zero for the test or assignment and for the course.

Point Totals

Book Responses	100 points (20 points each)
Research Paper	150 points
Class Participation	150 points (15 points for initial post, 10 points for response)
Total	350 points

Course Calendar

Week One: Christian America?

- Read John Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?*
- **Book review due no later than 9:00 p.m. Friday, May 17**
- **Discussion Board posts:**
 - Original post should consist of three or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and address at least one of the questions from the reading response form. Due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 15
 - Second post should consist of two or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and should engage with the posts others in the class submitted. Your second post is due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Sunday, May 19

Week Two: Secular America?

- Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*
- **Book review due no later than 9:00 p.m. Friday, May 24**
- **Discussion Board posts:**
 - Original post should consist of three or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and address at least one of the questions from the reading response form. Due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 22
 - Second post should consist of two or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and should engage with the posts others in the class submitted. Your second post is due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Sunday, May 26

Week Three:

- John McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*
- **Book review due no later than 9:00 p.m. Friday, May 31**
- **Discussion Board posts:**
 - Original post should consist of three or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and address at least one of the questions from the reading response form. Due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 29
 - Second post should consist of two or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and should engage with the posts others in the class submitted. Your second post is due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 2

Week Four

- Laurel Thatcher-Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*
- **Book review due no later than 9:00 p.m. Friday, June 7**
- **Discussion Board posts:**

- Original post should consist of three or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and address at least one of the questions from the reading response form. Due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 5
- Second post should consist of two or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and should engage with the posts others in the class submitted. Your second post is due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 9

Week Five

- Paul Barrett, *American Islam*
- **Book review due no later than 9:00 p.m. Friday, June 14**
- **Discussion Board posts:**
 - Original post should consist of three or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and address at least one of the questions from the reading response form. Due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 12
 - Second post should consist of two or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and should engage with the posts others in the class submitted. Your second post is due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 16

Week Six

- **Discussion Board posts:**
 - Original post should consist of three or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and address at least one of the questions from the reading response form. Due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 18
 - Second post should consist of two or more paragraphs (a paragraph consisting of at least 4-5 sentences) and should engage with the posts others in the class submitted. Your second post is due no later than 9:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 20
- **Final Paper due no later than 9:00 p.m Friday, June 21**