

Women and Religion in America Today

From Protestantism to Paganism

Instructor

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Office Location

Gilmore Hall, 322

Office Hours

9a-12p, Mondays

Course Overview

In this course, we will explore how women in the United States experience, interact with, and shape Christianity (and “post-Christian” spiritualities) today. By looking at texts that explore overt expressions of religiosity (e.g., Evangelical Christianity, Catholicism, and Neo-Paganism) as well as texts that explore how daily life is infused with religious meaning (e.g., weight loss culture, feminism, and reproduction), we will examine how religion is shaping and being shaped by broader themes in American culture today. This approach destabilizes the idea of an American society that is inherently secular or religious; instead, we will examine the ways in which “religion” and “spirituality” are emerging categories that resist fixed definitions and static categorizations.

Objectives

We will assess a number of trends, questions, and tensions in a variety of American Christian and post-Christian traditions with specific attention to different theoretical and methodological approaches and considerations during our time together in class. Because my training and research concerns primarily Protestantism in America, this course embraces this specialty. The intention, however, is that the questions and discussions we have in class, grounded in both theory and methodology, unfold in such a way that we develop tools and skills for analyzing and assessing other geographies, religions, and identities beyond those explicitly addressed in class texts.

Requirements

This course will be highly collaborative and discussion based. In order to facilitate discussion, you will be assigned and assessed on the following:

- *Class Preparation:* You will write a total of (10) two-page summary-analysis papers within which you will craft a thesis, briefly summarize, and carefully analyze one assigned text. Each paper is due on the day the text is being discussed in class. Percentage of Grade: 60%
- *Class Participation:* You will be expected to engage with texts, lecture material, and each other during every class period. To actively participate in class, you will be expected to have read the assigned text and will have a hard copy of the text at your disposal during each class meeting. You are permitted to miss (2) class periods throughout the semester with no penalty; further absences will

directly impact your participation points. You need not provide an excuse; you must however, email me prior to the start of class. Percentage of Grade: 20%

- *Group Presentation:* You—individually or as a group—will offer a thirty-minute seminar to your colleagues on a topic related to women and religion in America today that we have not covered in class. You will be responsible for 1) identifying and researching a topic, 2) presenting your findings to the class, and 3) preparing and leading the class through 2-3 discussion questions that connect your topic back to assigned course material. Percentage of Grade: 20%

Materials Needed

All of the assigned readings will be compiled into a reader that you can purchase from [insert print shop]. Please note that you will not be allowed to utilize technological devices of any kind during class. You are encouraged to take notes—with pen and paper. You will be required to bring a physical copy of the readings with you to every class meeting.

Course Schedule

Week	Subject	Reading Assignment
Week 1	Methods & Theories	Day 1: Kyla Wazana Tompkins, “Notes on How to Ask a Good Question about Theory That Will Promote Conversation and Further Discussion from Your Colleagues” Day 2: Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious”
Week 2	Methods and Theories	Day 1: Jonathan Z. Smith, “Map is Not Territory” Day 2: Bernhard Siegert, “The Map is the Territory”
Week 3	Methods and Theories	Day 1: Catherine A. Brekus, “Introduction: Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History” Day 2: Alex Mar from <i>Witches in America</i> “Keep Your Weapons Peace-Bonded,” “Diana of the Priries,” and “Three Nights at the Castle” AND Rhyd Wildermuth,

		“Eat, Pray, Learn Magic: Alex Mar’s Spiritual Tourism”
Week 4	Evangelical Christianity	Day 1: R. Marie Griffith from <i>God’s Daughters</i> “Introduction” and “For Such a Time as This: Aglow and American Culture” Day 2: Jessica Johnson from <i>Biblical Porn</i> “Introduction” and “Arousing Empire”
Week 5	Film: <i>Jesus Camp</i>	Day 1: Watch <i>Jesus Camp</i> Day 2: Discuss <i>Jesus Camp</i>
Week 6	Catholicism	Day 1: Kristy Nabhan-Warren, “Little Slices of Heaven and Mary’s Candy Kisses: Mexican American Women Redefining Feminism and Catholicism” Day 2: Sarah McFarland Taylor, from <i>Green Sisters</i> “The Green Catholic Imagination” and “Standing Their Ground”
Week 7	Lived and Material Christianity	Day 1: Susan Crawford Sullivan from <i>Living Faith</i> “Introduction: Listening to Poor Mothers about Religion” and “‘God Has a Plan’: Making Meaning” Day 2: Kate Bowler from <i>Blessed</i> “Introduction” and “Wealth”
Week 8	Bodies and Christianity	Day 1: R. Marie Griffith from <i>Born Again Bodies</i> “Introduction” and “Pray the Weight Away: Shaping Devotional Fitness Culture” Day 2: Michelle Mary Lelwica from <i>Starving for Salvation</i> “Introduction” and “Bodies of Knowledge of Evidence, Bodies of Knowledge”
Week 9	Reproduction	Day 1: Janet Jakobsen, “Sex + Freedom = Regulation: WHY?”

		Day 2: Pamela E. Klassen from <i>Blessed Events</i> “Introduction” and “Procreating Religion: Spirituality, Religion, and Transformations at Birth”
Week 10	Growing Up	Day 1: Sara Moslener from <i>Virgin Nation</i> “Introduction: Sexual Purity and National Security” and “Performing Sexual Purity in the Media Age” Day 2: Tom Shachtman from <i>Rumpringa</i> “Going Away” and “Women’s Lib Would Have a Field Day Among the Amish”
Week 11	Feminism	Day 1: Sarah Banet-Wieser from <i>Empowered</i> “Introduction” and “Shame: Love Yourself and Be Humiliated” Day 2: Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”
Week 12	Neo-Paganism	Day 1: Sarah M. Pike from <i>Earthy Bodies, Magical Selves</i> “Introduction: We Cast Our Circles Where the Earth Mother Meets the Sky Father” and “Serious Playing with the Self: Gender and Eroticism at the Festival Fire” Day 2: Jennifer Snook from <i>American Heathens</i> “Valkyries and Frithweavers: Women’s Shifting Roles—from Warriors to Domestic Caretakers”
Week 13	Film: <i>American Mysticism</i>	Day 1: Watch <i>American Mystic</i> Day 2: Discuss <i>American Mystic</i>
Week 14	Nones	Day 1: Ann W. Duncan, “Sacred Pregnancy in the Age of the ‘Nones’”

		Day 2: Dana W. Logan, “The Lean Closet: Asceticism in Postindustrial Consumer Culture”
Week 15	Presentations	Day 1: Two Presentations Day 2: Two Presentations
Week 16	Presentations	Day 1: Two Presentations Day 2: Two Presentations

Policies

EMAIL: I encourage you to contact me via email with questions or concerns about class. During the week, I will respond within 24 hours. Please do not, however, direct questions to me that can easily be answered by consulting the syllabus.

FEEDBACK: I am happy to work with you on your assignments during office hours or by appointment. I will not read drafts of papers or provide feedback, however, through email.

LATE WORK: Late work should not be an issue in this class. You will turn in all summary-analysis papers on the day we discuss the text you analyzed. You (and, if applicable, your group) will sign up for a presentation time that works with your schedule. Barring truly extenuating circumstances, no extensions will be given.

Resources

I encourage all of you to make use of the resources available to you on campus, particularly the following:
[INSERT]