

HTS 3018 -- NEW RELIGIONS AND CULTS IN AMERICA

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Spring Semester 2014
M, W, F, 12:00 noon

The United States has always provided fertile soil for new, unorthodox, and persecuted religious groups. Particularly during crisis periods in American life, many individuals have turned to new religions or have sought to return to their roots by revitalizing older faiths. The past several decades have witnessed one such period of religious turmoil and ferment. Beginning as something of a fringe counter-cultural phenomenon in the 1960s and 70s, new religious ideas and practices have spread today into "mainstream" religious organizations as well. At the same time, tragic excesses of certain groups such as the People's Temple in Guyana, the Branch Davidians in Waco, and Heaven's Gate in California also have highlighted the potential dangers of new religious and cultic movements.

This course will focus on four of the most interesting new religious movements that have been especially important during the past several decades:

(1) The neo-Pentecostal movement or Charismatic Revival, both in mainline Protestant and in Catholic churches, has brought ecstatic phenomena and spiritual healing into the lives of middle class Americans, much to the surprise of some scholars who thought that such phenomena were only appealing to the poor, downtrodden, and uneducated.

(2) The Nation of Islam, or "black Muslims"--developing among poor African Americans and being controversial for many Americans because of the group's original philosophy of hostility toward whites as literal "devils"--has been transformed into several groups, the largest of which has moved away from its early stridency to become an increasingly respectable and orthodox Muslim organization.

(3) The Mormons--once viewed as anathema because of their unorthodox religious beliefs and their now-discarded practice of polygamy--have achieved remarkable success, increasing their membership twelve-fold since 1945 and becoming the fourth largest religious denomination in the United States.

(4) And numerous religious groups influenced by Metaphysical, New Age, and Non-Western religious traditions--while still viewed with great suspicion by many Americans--have nevertheless proliferated and attracted widespread attention.

Each of these groups, appealing to different types of people and needs, suggests aspects of the current sense of crisis and ferment in America.

Evaluation in the course will be based on three exams covering specific topical areas (indicated below in the "outline"), on class participation, on a book review or special project, and on a final comprehensive exam. The exams will be based both on the readings and on the class lecture/discussions.

In addition to the handouts and items on library reserve, the following books are required reading:

Harvey Cox, Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century
 Malcolm X, with Alex Haley, The Autobiography of Malcolm X
 Lawrence Foster, Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community
 Susan Jean Palmer, Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religions

The class sessions will combine lectures and discussion, as well as films and possible outside speakers.

Since the required readings provide only a taste of the extensive literature on these movements, each student will be expected to choose a book on a topic related to the course that interests them and write a 6-to-10-page review of it. The student's book choice *must* be approved *in advance*, in consultation with the professor. More detailed instructions about the book reviews will be provided in class.

Area E Approved Learning Outcome:

Students will demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior.

Explain how the course satisfies the learning outcome:

This course will focus on how controversial new religious movements in America originate, develop, attract supporters and opponents, and both influence and are influenced by the larger American society. Students will learn how social, political, and economic forces impact social behavior by focusing primarily on four of the largest and/or best-known of new religious movements that have been active during the post-World War II era, namely, the neo-Pentecostal or charismatic movement among mainline Protestants and Catholics; the Nation of Islam and its transformation; the Mormons or Latter-day Saints and the group's dramatic expansion and changes; and a variety of metaphysically oriented and Eastern-influenced religious offshoots in America. Students will demonstrate that they have met the Area E learning outcomes through four written examinations; several short papers; in-class discussions; and a 6-10 page analytical book review that integrate course concepts and materials from the readings.

Course Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic factors that have influenced the origin, development, and institutionalization of controversial new religious movements or "cults" in the United States.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to describe the impact that new religious movements have had on the development of the United States, including why some of these groups become accepted as part of mainstream American society and why others have failed to achieve acceptance.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to describe the social, psychological, and economic characteristics of individuals who are most likely to become attracted to new religious movements, as well as the social and psychological impact that such groups can have on the lives of individuals who join such groups.
4. Students will demonstrate the ability to describe fairly and accurately, yet also critically, the beliefs and practices of some of the most influential new religious movements that have challenged recent American social, political, and economic practices.
5. Students will demonstrate an understanding of how the development of new religious movements in the United States has been related to larger periods of social, political, and economic crisis and change in American history.

Please Take Careful Note of the Following:

Students are expected to attend class regularly, come on time at the scheduled beginning of class (no later than 12:05 p.m.), and be ready to participate actively in class discussions on the assigned readings. Exceptions will be made for students coming from courses across campus.

Class roll will be taken after the first week. More than six (6) unexcused absences from class (the equivalent of 2 full weeks of class) may be grounds for reducing the student's overall course grade by as much as one full grade level (10 points).

Throughout this course, all students are expected to follow the Georgia Tech Honor Code.

OVERVIEW OF CLASS SESSIONS, ASSIGNMENTS, AND EXAMS:

(For specific reading assignments, consult the class-by-class reading assignment sheet)

I. Introduction to the Study of New Religious Movements and Cults in America

January 6, 8, 10, 13, 15, 17, 22, 24

Readings: Articles on the Branch Davidian Tragedy in Waco

Newsweek and Time articles on Jim Jones and related topics

Toby Lester, "Oh, Gods!

Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements"

Albert K. Bates, "What Really Happened at Waco? 'Cult' or Set-up?"

Films: "Holy Ghost People"

"Waco: A New Revelation"

NO CLASS: Monday, January 20--Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday celebrated

II. The Neo-Pentecostal Movement in Mainline Protestant and Catholic Churches

January 27, 29, 31; February 3, 5, 7

Readings: Harvey Cox, Fire From Heaven, selected chapters

Erling Jorstad, ed., The Holy Spirit in Today's Church, selections,

Library book reserve

Videos or speakers on the charismatic revival

EXAM #1 on Topics I and II -- Monday, February 10

III. The Nation of Islam and its Transformation toward World Islam

February 12, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24, 26, 28

Reading: Autobiography of Malcolm X, entire

Articles on Library on-line reserve

Videos or speakers on the Nation of Islam and its transformation

EXAM #2 on Topic III -- Monday, March 3

IV. The Mormons: Yesterday and Today

March 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 24, 26, 28

Readings: Lawrence Foster, Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons and the Oneida Community, chapters 1, 4, 5, 6
Articles on Mormonism on Library on-line reserve

Videos or speakers on the Mormons

NO CLASS: March 17-21--Happy Spring Break!

EXAM #3 on Topic IV-- Monday, March 31

V. Metaphysical, New Age, and Eastern Wisdom Movements since the 1960s

April 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 14, 16, 18, 21, 23, 25

Readings: Susan Jean Palmer, Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religious Movements, selected chapters
Other articles on Library on-line reserve

Videos or speakers on New Age and Eastern religious movements

BOOK REVIEWS due -- Wednesday, April 16

FINAL EXAM -- Wednesday, April 30, 11:30 a.m.

HTS 3018 -- New Religions
Lawrence Foster -- Spring 2014
READING ASSIGNMENTS:

January 6/8--begin Waco packet
January 10--begin Jonestown packet
January 13--begin Toby Lester, "Oh, Gods!"
January 15--begin Anthony Wallace, "Revitalization Movements"
January 17--begin Albert Bates, "What Really Happened at Waco?"

NO CLASS -- Monday, January 20--Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday celebrated

*January 20--begin Harvey Cox, Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century, introduction (pp. 1-17) & ch.2 (pp. 45-65)

January 22--begin Fire From Heaven, chs.3 & 4 (pp. 67-97)

January 24--begin Erling Jorstad, ed., The Holy Spirit in Today's Church, pp. 9-28,

January 27--begin Holy Spirit, pp. 58-99

January 29--begin Holy Spirit, pp. 100-118; Fire From Heaven, chs.5 & 6 (pp. 99-122)

January 31--begin Holy Spirit, pp. 135-153; Fire From Heaven, chs.7 & 8 (p. 123-156)

February 3--begin Fire from Heaven, ch.9 (pp. 161-184) & ch.12 (pp. 243-262)

February 5--begin Fire from Heaven, chs.13 & 14 (pp. 263-297), and begin Michael Lind,
"Rev. Robertson's Grand International Conspiracy Theory"

February 7, 10, 12--review for Exam #1 (DUE to DAYS LOST due to SNOW/ICE)

EXAM #1 -- Friday, February 10

*February 14--begin Autobiography of Malcolm X, Introduction and chs.1-3 (pp. 1-55)

February 17--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs.4-6 (pp. 56-107)

February 19--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs.7-9 (pp. 108-150)

February 21--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs.10-12 (pp. 151-210)

February 24--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs.13-15 (pp. 211-287)

February 26--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs.16-17 (pp. 288-342)

February 28--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs.18-19 (pp. 343-382)

March 3--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, Epilogue (pp. 383-460)

March 5--review for Exam #2

EXAM #2 -- Friday, March 7

*March 7--begin Lawrence Foster, Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community, ch.1 (pp. 1-20)

March 10--begin "Introduction: A New World Faith" (pp. xv-xxvi) and "The Gold Bible" (pp. 259-277) in Richard & Joan Ostling, Mormon America: The Power and the Promise

March 12--begin Religion and Sexuality, ch.4 (pp. 123-180)

March 14--begin Lawrence Foster, "The Psychology of Religious Genius: Joseph Smith and the Origins of New Religious Movements"

NO CLASS -- March 17-21--Georgia Tech Spring Break!--I suggest you start reading the book you will be reviewing!

March 24--begin Religion and Sexuality, ch.5 (pp.181-225)

March 26--begin reading Religion and Sexuality, ch.6 (pp. 226-247)

March 28--begin Lawrence Foster, "Cults in Conflict: New Religious Movements and the Mainstream Religious Tradition in America" AND begin reading Lawrence Foster, "From Activism to Domesticity: The Changing Role of Mormon Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries"

March 31--review for Exam #3

EXAM #3 -- Wednesday, April 2

*April 2--begin Susan J. Palmer, Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religions, ch.1 (pp. 1-12)

April 4--begin Moon Sisters, ch.2 (pp. 15-43)

April 7--begin Moon Sisters, ch.3 (pp. 44-72)

April 9--Book Review of Selling Satan (2 pages) AND Martin Gardner, "The Tragedies of False Memories" AND "Edward J. Moody, "Magical Therapy: An Anthropological Investigation of Contemporary Satanism"

April 11/14--work on Book Reviews

BOOK REVIEWS DUE -- Wednesday, April 16

*April 16--begin Moon Sisters, ch.7 (157-187)

April 18--begin Marybeth Ayella, Introduction to Insane Therapy: Portrait of a Psychotherapy Cult, pp. 1-14; and J. Gordon Melton and Robert L. Moore, "Understanding the Cultist: Snapping or Transformation?" in Melton and Moore, The Cult Experience, pp. 36-71.

April 21--begin Moon Sisters, ch.4 (pp. 75-104)

April 23--begin Moon Sisters, ch.6 (pp. 133-153)

April 25--review for FINAL EXAM

FINAL EXAM -- Wednesday, April 30, 11:30 a.m.