Nineteenth-Century American Religion: A Digital History Seminar

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Course description

During the American Revolution and the following decades, the state and federal governments cut their financial and constitutional support for established churches. Though many at the time predicted the demise of Christianity, the result was a flowering of an astonishing diversity of religions. In this course you will read the writings of the many individuals and groups that lived out their religion in the nineteenth-century United States: the alliance of skeptics and believers who supported disestablishment; Baptist and Methodists revivalists; Catholic priests, missionaries, and animists; founders of new religions such as Mormonism and Christian Science; Reform and Orthodox Jews; African-Americans; metaphysicians; liberal and conservative Protestants; agnostics and atheists. We will make sense of that diversity by asking and answering a set of unifying questions: How did mainstream and minority faiths relate to one another, especially in the public sphere? How did people experience religion in their everyday lives? How did religious people change laws and society? How did new forms of religious expression develop? How were new religions founded? How were religions imported from Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America, and how did those religions adapt? How did Americans become more religious and more secular at the same time?

The centerpiece of this class will be a digital history project: you will do your own original research into nineteenth-century sources to make a digital map of religion in Boston over the nineteenth century. Creating this project will teach you the skills of a historian—researching, writing, analyzing—and will let you put what you'll learn in this class to work on the ground. In this history class as shop class, you'll also learn digital and project skills—publishing, mapping, encoding, collaborating, communicating,

managing—that are widely useful in government, business, and research outside the academy.

You can get a sense of the kind of work that we will do in this class by examining these digital history mapping projects (starred projects are especially impressive):

- Americans in Paris:
  `<http://tocqueville.richmond.edu/AmericansInParis.html>`
- American Whaling Mapped:
  `<http://sappingattention.blogspot.com/2012/11/>`
- Aurora Project:
  `<http://auroraproject.unl.edu/index.html>`
- Hotchkiss's Maps of the Battles of Fredricksburg and Chancellorsville:
  `<http://neatline.org/neatline-in-action/>`
- Inventing the Map:
  `<http://henshaw.scholarslab.org/>`
- *Map of Early Modern London:
  `<http://mapoflondon.uvic.ca/>`
- Mapping Marriage and Migration in Emancipation-era Virginia:
  `<http://dsl.richmond.edu/civilwar/mme.html>`
- Mapping Richmond's Slave Market:
  `<http://dsl.richmond.edu/civilwar/slavemarket.html>`
- *Railroads and the Making of Modern America:
  `<http://railroads.unl.edu/>`
- Redlining Richmond:
  `<http://dsl.richmond.edu/holc/pages/home>`
- *Shaping the West:
  `<http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/project.php?id=997>`
- *Visualizing Emancipation:
  `<http://dsl.richmond.edu/emancipation/>`
- Travels Across the Plains:
  `<http://dsl.richmond.edu/oregontrail/>`
- Voting America: United States Politics, 1840–2008:
  `<http://dsl.richmond.edu/voting/indelections.php>`

This class is divided into three phases: *bootstrapping* (weeks 1–3), in which you will quickly gain a basic competency in the history of American religion, historical research skills, and the scholarly techniques and technologies of

the digital humanities; *building* (weeks 4–13), in which you will slowly build a deeper knowledge of religious history while you build the digital project; and *beta* (week 14), in which you will release the beta version of the digital project, and with it your own interpretation of nineteenth-century religion.

Learning goals

After taking this course, you will be able to

- explain the main themes of American religious history in the 19th century as they relate to many different denominations and religions;
- interpret the primary sources of American religious history;
- conduct original historical research in nineteenth-century primary sources;
- work collaboratively using the tools and techniques of digital humanities to create digital scholarship;
- conceive of and build a large scale digital project; and
- write effectively for a public audience.

The intellectual work of the course

The main work of this class will be a **digital research project**, produced in collaboration with your colleagues in the class. No less than the papers you write for other history classes, this project will be grounded in primary sources, conversant with secondary sources, and driven by an argument. You will have to do a lot of research and writing for this project, and you will learn the skills to create a digital project along the way.

The digital project will be about mapping religion in greater Boston over time and space. Exactly what that will entail will be up to you. It might help you to think of the assignment as a project that you, the historians and developers, are creating for me, the client. You will be working in small teams, which I will assign early in the course. There will be several steps along the way. First, by the end of week 3, your group will present a **project proposal/contract**, which will specify the historical sources and technologies that the project will use, the goals that the project will accomplish, and the specific duties of each team member. Second, beginning in week 4 your group will give brief project updates each week in class. Third, in week 11, we will collaboratively draft **standards for evaluating projects**, based on DH projects funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities Office of Digital Humanities and created by DH shops at other universities. Fourth,

your group will make a **formal presentation** of your work on the last day of class.

The other main work you will do is **reading and discussing** American religious history in the nineteenth century. In the first three weeks of the class, you will read Butler, Wacker, and Ballmer's survey history of American religion and a more detailed history of an American religious tradition of your choice (see below), and you will **write a review** (5–7 pages) comparing the two books. For each class period in weeks 4 to 14, you will **read primary sources**, which you must be prepared to discuss.

Because this class is collaborative and self-directed, much of the communication between you and your colleagues, and between you and me, will happen on the **course blog**. Beginning in week 3, you will write a minimum of one brief blog post per week, describing the work you've done on the digital project. (You can write as many posts as you like.) Topics can include the research you're doing, the skills you're learning, the decisions you're making, the connections you're drawing to the class readings, and the like. You will also make at least two comments per week on your colleagues' posts.

Evaluation

The assignments for this course will receive these weights. For assignments which are collaborative, your grade will be determined both by your individual contribution and by the overall quality of the project.

assignment	weight
digital research project	50%
presentation of project	10%
readings and discussions	20%
book review	10%
blogging	10%

Texts

All of the primary source readings (listed on the schedule) will be available on the course website. Everyone will need to buy a copy of this historical survey:

Randall Balmer, Jon Butler and Grant Wacker, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

You will need to buy or otherwise obtain your choice of the texts below.

Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Paul Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through the Night: A History of African American Christianity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011).

Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1992).

James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009).

Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

Course Schedule

U.S. Religion in the 19th Century

Bootstrapping

Week 1, class 1 Introduction to nineteenth-century U.S. religious history

Week 1, class 2 Introduction to digital history

   due: 5-minute informal presentation on a DH project

Week 2, class 3 How to find and read primary sources in religious history

Week 2, class 4 Spatial history

   reading: Richard White, "What Is Spatial History?"; Jo Guldi, "What is the Spatial Turn?" and "The Spatial Turn in History"

Week 3, class 5 Discussion of secondary works

   due: review of the book of your choice

Week 3, class 6 Lab day

   due: project proposal/contract

Building

Week 4, class 7 Disestablishment

   reading: Thomas Jefferson, Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom; correspondence between Newport synagogue and George Washington; John Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable*

Week 4, class 8 The Second Great Awakening

   reading: Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography*

   due: revision of proposal/contract (if needed)

Week 5, class 9 Catholic revivalism

reading: Isaac T. Hecker, diary and letters; Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, letters

Week 5, class 10 Cherokees and Moravians

reading: John Howard Payne and Daniel Butrick, *Papers*; Rowena McClinton, ed., *Moravian Springplace Diary*

Week 6, class 11 The Eliot School rebellion

reading: The Bible and Our School System

Week 6, class 12 Unitarianism and Transcendentalism

reading: William Ellery Channing, "Christianity a Rational Religion"; Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Divinity School Address"

Week 7, class 13 The moral establishment

reading: People v. Ruggles; George Washington Bungay, *Temperance Anecdotes*

Week 7, class 14 Women's religion

reading: Hannah Adams, *Memoir*; Rebecca Gratz, selected letters; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*

Week 8, class 15 Slave religion

reading: Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*; Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave*; collected spirituals

Week 8, class 16 Abolitionism and anti-abolitionism

reading: Angelina Grimké, *An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*; Robert L. Dabney, *A Defense of Virginia*

Week 9, class 17 The Civil War

reading: William Meade, "Address on the Day of Fasting and Prayer"; Horace Bushnell, "Reverses Needed"; Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address"

Week 9, class 18 American religion seen from Europe

reading: Philip Schaff, *America: A Sketch of the Political, Social, and Religious Character of the United States of North America*

Week 10, class 19 Mormonism

reading: Excerpts from *Book of Mormon*; Parley Parker Pratt, *Autobiography*

Week 10, class 20 Immigrant religion

reading: Abraham Kohn, "A Jewish Peddler's Diary"; *Baltimore Catechism*

Week 11, class 21 Metaphysical religion

reading: Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures*; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "The Sympathy of Religions"

Week 11, class 22 African-American religion

reading: W. E. B. DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*

due: draft of standards for evaluating projects

Week 12, class 23 Agnosticism and freethought

reading: Robert Ingersoll, "Why I Am an Agnostic"

Week 12, class 24 Reform and Orthodox Judaism

reading: The Pittsburgh Platform; Platform of the Orthdox Jewish Congregational Union of America

due: revision of standards for evaluating projects (if needed)

Week 13, class 25 The social gospel

reading: Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?*

Week 13, class 26 World's Parliament of Religions

reading: John Henry Barrows, ed., *The World's Parliament of Religions*

Week 14, class 27 The study of religion

reading: William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*

Beta

Week 14, class 28 Project presentations

due: written evaluations of group work

Course Policies

U.S. Religion in the 19th Century: A Digital History Seminar

Assignments

I may change due dates or assignments. I will always give you plenty of notice of changes, which will always be intended for your benefit.

Students must satisfactorily complete all assignments (including participation assignments) in order to pass this course.

Academic integrity

You are expected to know and follow Brandeis University's policies on academic integrity <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai>.

Course website and privacy

You will have to make an account on the course website for your online writing assignments. You may use either your real name or a *nom de plume* (which I will keep confidential). You retain the copyright to everything that you have written.

Handing in papers

For any written assignments, attach a cover sheet with your name, your e-mail address, the date, and the course name. This cover sheet does not count towards the required pages for each assignment. No identifying information, such as your name, should be on the main pages of the assignment. I ask for a cover sheet so that I can grade impartially: this is to your advantage. Staple all pages together.

You must turn in all assignments both in paper and electronically. You should hand in the paper copy of each assignment at the start of class. You should turn in the electronic copy to the LATTE drop box before the start of class. Please submit only PDFs. You should title your filename something like `Lastname-Firstname.book-review.pdf`.

Late work

I am willing to grant extensions for cause, but you must request an extension well in advance of the assignment's due date. For every day or part of a day that an assignment is late, I will deduct one letter grade.

Participation and attendance

Your attendance is expected every day without exception. We will be working closely in

community, so I hope you will develop a good working relationship with everyone in the class. You should complete readings and assignments before class each day, and you are expected to actively participate by listening, questioning, and speaking.

If you must be absent, I request that you notify me by e-mail in advance of class meeting. Even if you are absent, you must turn in assignments before the time when our class meets.

After the first two absences from class, the relevant portion of your grade for the class will be lowered for each absence.

Communications

I am always glad to meet with you in person. You can make an appointment for office hours using the Google Calendar link on the course website. If none of those times fit your schedule, we can find another time that does. From time to time I may offer online office hours in the evening.

For all other communications I prefer e-mail <lmullen@brandeis.edu>. I will reply to your messages within 24 hours (but never on a Sunday). I will send official course communications to your Brandeis e-mail address, which you should check regularly.

I will discuss grades only in person.

Electronic devices

Because this is a digital history class you should feel free to bring laptops and other devices to work on the project. During class discussions of texts, however, there will be little need for the use of laptops. Except for extraordinary circumstances, I can't see any reason why you

would need to use a cell phone in class, so please stow all phones before class begins.

Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please speak with me immediately.

Acknowledgments and license

This syllabus borrows ideas from other digital history classes taught by Jeremy Boggs, Mills Kelly, Tona Hangen, and especially Jeff McClurken.

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