

History 500: Reading Seminar in History  
**Religion and Politics in Modern American History**  
Spring 2022  
5255 Mosse Humanities (in-person)  
Mondays, 1:20-3:15pm

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5269 Mosse Humanities  
Office hours: Tuesdays 1-3pm or by appointment (in-person and Zoom)  
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(This course is face to face instructional mode)

### **Description**

How has religion shaped American political and cultural life? Looking at the United States in the 2020s can offer partial answers to these pressing questions, but the historical picture is more complicated, and more nuanced, than our contemporary moment. In this reading seminar we will explore the intersection of American religion and politics in the past century, roughly from the period of World War I to the present, in order to better assess their intricate relationships. We will also highlight the plurality and diversity of American religion and the many ways minority communities have influenced, interacted with, resisted, supported, and subverted the majority.

The course is divided into three parts; each of which covers a specific theme and focus:

- Part I centers the role of culture, especially divided visions of sexuality, gender, and family, in the intersection of religion and politics in the last century.
- Part II examines case studies on core issues at the intersection of religion and politics in the post-World War II period. We will see how these studies interact with the larger themes of the era.
- Part III contextualizes our current moment in the early twenty-first with accounts that point to significant shifts in American religion in recent decades, and which are deeply entwined with the history we explored throughout the semester.

This is a reading intensive course, with many class discussions based on entire books (with an expected average of 150 pages/week). We will work to not only learn about our historical subjects, but also to learn better how to read this type of material and synthesize scholarly research into a deeper understanding of the world. The selection of books tends toward those published in the last decade—there has been a flood of excellent historical and other material on religion and politics produced by scholars in recent years. While the reading load is demanding, these books are standout examples produced from diverse scholarly backgrounds that ask and answer important and interesting questions.

### **Learning Outcomes**

- Develop empathy towards the experience of others by learning about and comparing the intertwined histories of American religious traditions, communities, and politics.
- Analyze complex developments and events in history from multiple perspectives.
- Gain appreciation for both monographic and survey genres of historical writing.
- Gain understanding for how the discipline of history interacts with sociology, religious studies, and journalism on issues of American religion and politics.
- Develop effective reading and writing skills to synthesize complex historical material.

- Demonstrate the relevance of historical perspectives to contemporary religious and political issues.
- Communicate effectively through group discussion and written work.

### Academic Integrity

Students should consult “UWS 14” of the University of Wisconsin System Administrative Code in order to familiarize themselves with the University’s policy regarding academic integrity and plagiarism. Submitting work that is not original will result in a zero for that portion of the course grade, and the instructor will refer the details of the case to Student Assistance and Judicial Affairs.

### Disabilities

Please let me know of any accommodations that I can arrange. For additional assistance, please contact the McBurney Disability Resource Center: [mcburney.wisc.edu](mailto:mcburney.wisc.edu), 608-263-2741 (phone), or 608-225-7956 (text).

### COVID and Absences

If you test positive for COVID or if you feel any of the symptoms associated with the illness, do not come to class. While you are absent, do your best to keep up with the reading and please check in with me. It will benefit you to check in with your peers, as well. Notice that the writing assignments give you flexibility in the selection of topic and texts.

### Course Credit

This three-credit course meets as a group seminar for 115 minutes each week. You are also expected to spend an average of seven hours per week outside of class time reading, writing, and preparing for class discussions and presentations, for a total of 135 hours over the semester (or 45 hours per credit, according to UW-Madison’s credit hour policy). Some weeks the workload may be slightly heavier; other weeks it may be lighter. Please plan your time accordingly.

### The History Lab

The History Lab is an excellent resource for undergraduates writing history papers. Trained Ph.D. students in history will help you regardless of your stage in the writing process—formulating a thesis, developing your argument, citing sources, revising your drafts, and more. The History Lab is located in 4255 Mosse Humanities Building. Sign up for a one-on-one appointment, either in-person or online, at <https://history.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program/the-history-lab/>.

### Required texts

Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). ISBN: 0520256816 \*

Tara Isabella Burton, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2020). ISBN: 1541762533

Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2021). ISBN: 163149905X \*

Alison Collis Greene, *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). ISBN: 0199371873

R. Marie Griffith, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2017). ISBN: 0465094759

Lauren R. Kerby, *Saving History: How White Evangelicals Tour the Nation's Capital and Redeem a Christian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020). ISBN: 1469658771 \*

Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *Meatpacking America: How Migration, Work, and Faith Unite and Divide the Heartland* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021). ISBN: 146966349X \*

Ansley L. Quiros, *God with Us: Lived Theology and the Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1942–1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018). ISBN: 1469646765 \*

David R. Swartz, *Facing West: American Evangelicals in an Age of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). ISBN: 0190250801 \*

Daniel K. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement before Roe v. Wade* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016). ISBN: 0199391645

\* book is available digitally through the UW Library.

### Evaluation

Attendance & Participation	30%
Discussion Leadership	10%
Weekly Written Responses	20%
Paper I	20%
Paper II	20%

*Attendance & Participation (30%).* Promptness and regular attendance are crucial for the success of this class—not just for your own success, but also for the success of your classmates and instructor. Please be respectful and responsible by arriving on time, preparing for class, and contributing to the discussion.

*Discussion Leadership (10%).* In addition to participating every week, students will work in pairs to lead discussion, beginning Week 8 (3/21). Consider the syllabus for the week you would like to lead discussion.

*Weekly Written Responses (20%).* For each regular class session beginning Week 4 (2/21), I will post one question on Canvas Discussions about the assigned readings. These questions will ask you to identify and analyze historical themes or arguments made by our readings. You may choose which six (of a possible nine) of these exercises to complete a 200-300 word response. To receive credit for a response, you must submit it on Canvas on the day of class by noon. No late submissions will be accepted.

*Paper I (20%).* 5-6 pages. Students will respond to a prompt related to Griffith, *Moral Combat* that will be handed out in Week 4 (2/21) and will have two weeks to complete. No outside reading is required.

*Paper II (20%).* 5-6 pages. Students will respond to a prompt related to Part II & III readings that will be handed out in Week 13 (4/25) and will have two weeks to complete. No outside reading is required.

### Schedule

1/31 **Week 1: Welcome, Critically Exploring Religion & Politics**  
Read: Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (1988), 3-10 (pdf)

PART I: SURVEY

2/7 **Week 2: Religion & Culture I**  
Read: Griffith, *Moral Combat* (1-154)

2/14 **Week 3: Religion & Culture II**  
Read: Griffith, *Moral Combat* (155-end)

PART II: CASE STUDIES

2/21 **Week 4: Religion, Race, and the Great Depression**  
Read: Greene, *No Depression in Heaven* (1-129, 161-201)

2/28 **Week 5: Reading/Writing time--Paper I Due Friday, March 4 @ 5pm**  
No assigned reading

3/7 **Week 6: Pro-life before Roe v. Wade**  
Read: Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn* (1-38, 156-268)

3/14 **Week 7: Spring Break**  
No assigned reading

3/21 **Week 8: Jews in American Society**  
Read: Berman, *Speaking of Jews* (1-72, 93-173)

3/28 **Week 9: Civil Rights and Southern Religion**  
Read: Quiros, *God with Us* (1-80, 140-200)

4/4 **Week 10: Masculinity in White Evangelicalism**  
Read: Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne* (1-59, 74-102, 151-218, 250-304)

4/11 **Week 11: Globalizing Evangelicalism**  
Read: Swartz, *Facing West* (1-12, 97-132, 165-198, 235-305)

PART III: THE PRESENT

4/18 **Week 12: Post-Christian Spirituality**  
Read: Burton, *Strange Rites* (1-165, 239-246)

4/25 **Week 13: Christian Nationalism**  
Read: Kerby, *Saving History* (1-146)

5/2 **Week 14: Contemporary Religion in the Midwest**  
Read: Nabhan-Warren, *Meatpacking America* (1-72, 135-218)

**Paper II Due Wednesday, May 11 @ 5pm**