

Religious Studies 302I
Dr. Diana Steigerwald

AMERICAN RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Spring 2007 (MW 9:30-10:45)
Office: MHB 612
Hours: M 11:00AM-12:00
W 2:00-2:30PM
Tu 4:45-5:15PM

Email: dsteiger@csulb.edu

Course Description: This course will use some methods of history of religions to explore the religious and social ethical aspects of American diversity. It will not cover every religion in America nor every ethnic group. This course will cover basic information about the main religions practiced by some ethnic groups in America. The point is to show how these world religions have been modified and adapted to the American context. This course presents briefly an examination of some 19th century immigrant groups and their patterns of cultural and religious assimilation into the main streams of American culture.

Course Objectives: This course aims to develop the student's understanding of the American religious diversity. It introduces the students to the methods of the history of religions (historical and phenomenological approaches) to explore the religious and social ethical aspects of American diversity. Students must learn in the class to approach religion from a scholarly academic perspective. In this course, students will:

- a) to expose students to the pluralisms of culture, ethnic groups, and viewpoints which compose American society. It is hoped that such exposure will result in greater appreciation and respect for others who are different.
- b) to make students aware of the religious identity of some ethnic groups which exist in America as well as the religious diversity which exists across ethnic lines. This course will focus on four ethnic groups such as: Native Americans, Asian Americans, Black Americans and Middle Eastern Americans.
- c) be encouraged to think critically about some religion practiced in America in assignments and exercises that require them to work with the facts of religion rather than mere opinions about it,
- d) understand how some world religions (the Native American religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and Islam) have been modified and adapted to the American context.

Course Requirements:

20% Students have to do all the scheduled readings. They have to do two (2) syntheses chosen out of a limited choice. Each synthesis will count 10%. For the first synthesis, students must choose to do either **synthesis 1 or 2**. For the second synthesis, students must do **synthesis 3**. Students are expected to complete assigned reading prior to each section and to give a short synthesis (**5 pages** typed double space Times New Roman point size 12) of each reading assignment on the day indicated on the schedule. The students must give a complete summary of the text and each paragraph must at least have one reference indicating the pages summarized (ex. B1 or B2 pp. 54-89). The students must write *their personal comments in italics* assessing critically the text *in half of a page*. Each short synthesis must be submitted on time. Missed due dates will result in grade penalties. All written assignments must be done individually. You will be graded for the structure, the clarity and the quality of arguments, your capacity to summarize essentials ideas and your critical thinking.

10% The **Quiz on April 9** follows the same requirements as the final exam, except that there will be no essay questions in the quiz. **Students must write the exam with their best handwriting in square letters, if their handwriting is unreadable they might loose many points.**

30% The **Final Exam on Friday May 25 at 8:00** will contain an introductory section of identifications to be answered in five sentences or more. These are aimed at testing students' direct knowledge of material covered in lectures and readings. The essay questions to be answered in minimum one page or more, will be weighted more strongly. Essay questions will be general and broad, designed to test the students' overall grasp of ideas and religious, philosophical, and cultural processes, rather than specific facts. Good style and the ability to think critically are essential and students should develop their thoughts in an in-depth manner. Individual and creative thinking will be encouraged, but these should be tied to a realistic appraisal of the results of scholarly research on

the subject. **Students must write the exam with their best handwriting in square letters, if their handwriting is unreadable they might lose many points.**

20% The class will be divided into groups of three or maximum four students. Each group will write a play inspired from a novel or a biography. Each member of the group should speak no more than five minutes and should say at least 400 words in the play. For example the play's length for a group of four should be 4 X 400 words = 1600 words. The play should not exceed 400 words per member.

The Professor will assign one book per group:

I Heard the Owl Call My Name by Margaret Craven (novel);
Go Tell it On the Mountain by James Baldwin (novel);
Martin and Malcolm and America by James Cone (biography);
Black Elk Speaks by John Neihardt (novel).

Unlike the synthesis, you are graded more severely on the play. The deadline for submission of the written version of the play is March 26, 2007. The play must emphasize the moral content of the novel or biography and there must be a lesson to learn from it. A missed due date will result in grade penalties. The group will receive one grade that will be shared by all. I will give 70% for the structure, clarity and quality of the arguments and 30% for the mechanical elements of the paper (diction, grammar, bibliography indicating the complete reference of the novel (author, title, city, publisher, date), the students in their play must refer at least four times to the book indicating the author and the page in parenthesis.

10% **Presentation of the play;** I will give some time in class for each group (four members) to write together the play, and the group **will present the play to the class on a date, after March 26,** which will be determined by the professor.

10% (**Group work** requiring the integration of knowledge done in class related to the reading of the week or to complementary topics). Students will work in groups (four members) each week. As part of the requirements of the courses, students will keep a guided journal in which they will explore their responses to a daily question or problem that the professor will give them. The purpose of the journal is to stimulate thinking about issues, questions, and problems raised by the study of religion. This journal will be an exam preparation journal from which exam questions will be derived. In focused freewriting, however, the students need to keep their entire entry focused on the assigned question or problem. Their purpose is to explore their responses to the question as fully as possible within the set time period. After, each individual will join a group and will be given a set time to debate alternative solutions to the same problem. **In a plenary session, groups report and justify their solutions to the whole class.**

10% Students may voluntarily choose to do **synthesis 4 or 5** to increase their average and to gain **10% extra points.**

Academic Integrity: The University expects that students will submit their own original work and properly cite sources for their ideas, including books, handouts, class notes, and ideas from other students. **Plagiarism is a serious matter. Students found to be cheating on any exam, syntheses, papers, attendance or other course element may lead the Professor to "the assignment of a failing grade for a course and for administrative actions which may lead to dismissal from the university."** (See campus policies.).

Attendance: Student presence is important. Class work comprises a substantial component of the course grade, and one must be present to participate. However, for serious reasons "1. Illness or injury, or serious illness of an immediate family member, 3. Religious reasons, 4. Jury duty or government obligation, 5. University sanctioned or approved activities" (see campus policies) a student will receive an excused absence. In such a case, it is the student's responsibility to provide documentation and find out what he or she missed.

Grading scale: A= 90-100; B = 80-89; C= 70-79; D= 55-69; F= 0-55

Required Books:

1) Peter Williams, *America's religions: from Their Origins to the Twenty-first Century*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2002. **B1**

2) *World Religions in America An Introduction*, edited by Jacob Neusner, Louisville (Kentucky), Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. **B2**

3) Buy one of these books which will be assigned by the Professor to your group:

I Heard the Owl Call My Name by Margaret Craven;

Go Tell it On the Mountain by James Baldwin;

Black Elk Speaks by John Neihardt;

Martin and Malcolm and America by James Cone.

N.B. POLICY ON LATE PAPERS: I will not accept any synthesis or play later than the following class. Unless for serious reasons "1. Illness or injury, or serious illness of an immediate family member, 3. Religious reasons, 4. Jury duty or government obligation, 5. University sanctioned or approved activities" (see campus policies). In such a case, it is the student's responsibility to provide documentation with their late assignment. I do not accept assignments by email you must bring a hard copy in class.

Note: Please observe ordinary classroom decorum. For example: Be on time and don't leave early. Don't distract the class with ongoing conversations. Turn off beepers and cell phones, etc.

Schedule of reading assignments

January 29	Course outline
February 5	B2 Native Americans and Their Religions, pp. 9-21; B1, pp. 11-23
February 12	B2 The Religious World of African Americans, pp. 49-63 B1 pp. 23-28
February 21	B2 Hinduism in India and in America, pp. 125-140. Deadline SYNTHESES 1, B1 11-23 ;B2, pp. 9-21, 125-140.
February 26	B2 Buddhism in the World and in America, pp. 143-152. Deadline SYNTHESES 2 B1, pp. 23-28; B2, pp. 49-63, 143-152.
March 5	B1 Asian Traditions and American Transformations, pp. 457-477.
March 12	B2 East Asian Religions in Today's America, pp. 155-168. Deadline SYNTHESES 3, B1, pp. 457-477; B2, pp. 155-168.
March 19	B1 Islam in the United States, pp.448-452
March 26	<i>Deadline for the written version of the play</i>
April 2	(Spring Recess)
April 9	QUIZ
April 16	B1 Islam in the United States, pp.452-457
April 23	Deadline SYNTHESES 4, B1 448-457
April 30	B2, Islam in the World and in America, pp. 173- 178
May 7	B2, Islam in the World and in America, pp. 178- 184.
May 14	Deadline SYNTHESES 5, B2 pp. 173-184