

**RS 258. SEMINAR IN RELIGION IN AMERICA
THE NINETEENTH AMERICAN CENTURY (1820-1914)**

Professor Catherine L. Albanese
Winter 2013

Thursdays 12:00-2:50 pm
HSSB 3001E

Course Description

The nineteenth *American* century extends from the early national period through the antebellum and postbellum years to the time of World War I. It was a time and a space in which, arguably, the religious and spiritual universe that Americans now inhabit was set in place. Perhaps to a slower beat than at present, but still dramatic and real, a technological revolution swept through the land. Previously, stage coaches could go at the maximum speed of seven miles an hour; now trains could reach sixty and settled down to average thirty-five. Steamboats changed over-the-water travel forever. Sustainable small-farm agriculture and cottage industries gave way increasingly to global markets and factories producing manufactured goods on large-scale fronts. Meanwhile, scientific challenges brought new scrutiny of the Bible, and higher criticism of the scripture began to erode faithfully held views of the origins of life and its spread. Frontier fever, increasing immigration from abroad, and emigration from small villages and towns to growing cities chipped away at communal identities and ways of living. More and more, people were nudged into individualizing patterns in which they needed to cope on their own and find the spiritual resources to do so. Seeker culture grew apace, and new religious movements abounded. An era of religious experiment and change seemed everywhere burgeoning.

In religious terms, more specifically, these developments were expressed in a rising evangelical culture, often with aspirations toward social reform, and in a democratic outburst of new religious movements such as Mormonism, Shakerism, Christian Science, and the like. (European) Continental romanticism found its American partner in the New England Transcendentalism that looked toward European spiritual currents as well as Asian ones. After the Civil War, metaphysical movements, like Theosophy and New Thought, especially found a welcome haven in this new America, even as, before and after the war, mainline Protestants solidified their presence in a “benevolent empire” with political power and savvy. By the end of the era, in a contrasting movement, fundamentalism was flourishing.

Arguably, all of these were the building blocks (or moving currents) that shaped the spiritual and religious America of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Given that estimate, an immersion in the religious phenomena that transformed the nineteenth American century is basic for any meaningful comprehension of what followed. We will move through this nineteenth-century spiritual terrain with the help of both primary and secondary sources, letting the compelling nature of these documents guide us and, as we

go, noticing the correlations (and dissonances) between past and present. If there is theory to be made out of all this, it must come, first, through thorough familiarity with the documents.

Course Readings

January 10

The Democratization of American Christianity

Hatch, Nathan O.

Yale University Press, 1991

Paperback edition

ISBN-10: 0300050607

ISBN-13: 978-0300050608

January 17

The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850

Cross, Whitney R.

Cornell University Press, 1981

Paperback edition

ISBN-10: 0801492327

ISBN-13: 978-0801492327

January 24

Lectures on Revivals of Religion

Charles G. Finney

Bethany House, 1989

Paperback edition

ISBN-10: 1556610629

ISBN-13: 978-1556610622

January 31

Revivalism and Social Reform

Smith, Timothy Lawrence

Wipf & Stock, 2004

Paperback edition

ISBN-10: 1592449980

ISBN-13: 978-1592449989

February 7

The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844

Brooke, John L.

Cambridge University Press, 1996

ISBN-10: 0521565642

ISBN-13: 978-0521565646

February 14

FIRST PAPER DUE

American Scriptures: An Anthology of Sacred Writings, 32-93, 116-69, 194-219, 378-406

Maffly-Kipp, Laurie F., ed.

Penguin Classics, 2010

Paperback edition

ISBN-10: 0143106198

ISBN-13: 978-0143106197

February 21

The Spirituality of the American Transcendentalists: Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Amos Bronson Alcott, Theodore Parker, and Henry David Thoreau, 1-33, 45-126, 289-343

Albanese, Catherine L.

Mercer University Press, 1988

ISBN-10: 0865542589

ISBN-13: 978-0865542587

February 28

A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion, 1-18, 121-495

Albanese, Catherine L.

Yale University Press, 2008

Paperback edition

ISBN-10: 0300136153

ISBN-13: 978-0300136159

March 7

The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers (Parts One through Four), 2-353

Stein, Stephen J.

Yale University Press, 1994

Paperback edition

ISBN-10: 0300059337

ISBN-13: 978-0300059335

March 14

SECOND PAPER DUE

The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930

Sandeen, Ernest R.

University of Chicago Press; Reprint ed., 2008

Paperback edition

ISBN-10: 0226734684

ISBN-13: 978-0226734682

Course Requirements

One or more short presentations of seminar readings.

Weekly short written responses to readings (1-2 pp.).

Two substantial papers—one reviewing the primary-source readings and reflecting on them critically, and one reviewing the secondary-source readings and reflecting on these critically. The first will be due about halfway through the course, and the second, at the end.

P/F option: Short weekly papers only.

Additional Information

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NB. I do not accept papers as email attachments! Thanks.