Religion and Society in America
HI 203E
3 credits

Dawson Community College
Fall 2003
Th 7:00 – 10:00 p.m
UC105 and ITV

Instructor: Dr. Bryan E. Stone
Office: Rm. 113
Office Hours: MWF 8-10; TTh 9:30 - 11, 12:30-1:00
Phone: 377-9439 or 1-800-821-8320
E-mail: stone@dawson.edu
Website: TBA

Course Description
The central issue of this course is the place of religion in American life. The United States is a unique mixture of sacred and secular, "one nation under God" which insists on separating church and state. It's a nation founded with a sense of Christian mission which has had to accommodate millions of immigrants who have brought competing religious views and expectations. The writers we will study this semester come from a variety of religious backgrounds and points of view, but they all address the question of what religion is and what role it should play in the daily lives of Americans. Through their work we will see how the relationships between church, state and the individual have changed over the years and how religious values (or the struggle against them) have been at the heart of many of the most important developments in American life.

Audience
There are no prerequisites for HI 203E, although college-level reading and writing skills are required. I encourage anyone who would like extra assistance in those areas to visit the DCC Learning Center. This course counts toward DCC’s Core III requirement and may transfer to other colleges; check with your adviser for transfer information.

Course Objectives
Upon successful completion of this course, you will
1. learn to distinguish between religious experience in general and the particular beliefs of different faiths;
2. understand that studying religion and society is not about passing judgment on anyone’s particular beliefs, but about an open-minded exploration of belief itself as a powerful social force;
3. understand the difference between the “sacred” and “secular” aspects of our lives, and appreciate the complicated relationship between them;
4. learn about many specific moments in American history when religious ideals directly affected the public life of the nation;
5. develop a greater ability to read closely, to discuss, and to understand a variety of literary texts from genres including fiction, autobiography, journalism, film, and poetry;
6. improve your ability to think about matters of faith, morality, meaning, and history, and to express yourself clearly in class discussion and in writing;
7. appreciate the tremendous diversity of American religious experience and its importance in shaping the lives of Americans as individuals, as citizens, and as members of a society.

Required Reading
The required texts for this course, available at the DCC bookstore, are:

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*  
James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers*  
Flannery O’Connor, *Wise Blood*

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*  
Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*

There is also a required course packet of articles and shorter readings available at the bookstore. Weekly reading assignments are listed on the accompanying schedule.

Method of Grading
I will determine your final grade as follows:

1. **Papers:** 40% (Film Review, 10%; Book Review, 10%; Current Events Essay, 20%)
   You will be required to write two short (3-5 page) papers, a film review and a book review, as well as a longer (6-8 page) research paper on a contemporary issue. See the attached Class and Reading Schedule for due dates. Detailed directions are available in the course packet, and we will review them in class later. **Please note the following rules for all written assignments.**

   **Papers are due without exception on the stated dates:** you will lose a letter grade (10 points) for each class day they are late. A “page” must be typed and numbered, double-spaced, with a 1-inch margin all the way around, and in 12-point font (this size). If you are unsure what this means or how to set your word processor to these specifications, please ask.

   I’ll be more than happy to talk to you about your works-in-progress and to review drafts with you. You may rewrite papers for a better grade, but you must discuss your plans for improvement with me first; any late penalties applied to the original paper will still count against the rewrite. I will grade written assignments, including exams, on the basis of clarity, thoroughness, use of supporting evidence, accuracy, and originality. Using lots of detailed examples is the key to doing well written work.
2. **Exams:** 40% (average of midterm and final)
There will be two take-home exams, a midterm and a final. These will cover the readings, lectures, and class discussions and will be a combination of short answer and essay questions. You will have a full week to complete each exam, and therefore **there will be no make-up available if you neglect to turn your exam in on time.** If you miss class on the day an exam is distributed, you are solely responsible for contacting me to get a copy.

3. **Quizzes:** 10%
I will give a brief quiz every week over the reading assignments and the previous week’s lecture material. Averaged together, they will comprise your quiz grade.

4. **Class Participation:** 10% (Attendance, 5%; Participation/Preparation, 5%)
You are required to attend class regularly and to arrive on time. I will take roll daily, and more than three absences will count against you in your class participation score. If you are late for class, I will count you absent unless you notify me immediately after class of your presence.

Much of our class time will be spent in detailed discussion of the readings, so you are expected to come to class with the day’s assigned reading complete, with the texts in your hand, and ready to participate actively in a conversation about them. I will supplement the readings with lectures to provide historical background and offer some new ways of thinking about the material. I will inevitably do most of the talking during lectures, but I invite you to stop me at any time to ask questions, contribute ideas, or challenge my statements.

**Grade Distribution**

- A – 90-100
- B – 80-89
- C – 70-79
- D – 60-69
- F – 59 and below

**Classroom Behavior**
If you are to succeed in this class, as in the “real world” beyond DCC, certain mature and respectful behavior will be expected of you. My expectations in this class include (but are not limited to) the following:

1. **Arrive on time and remain seated until class is dismissed.** If you won’t be able to stay through an entire class period, please don’t come at all.
2. **Refrain from eating and chewing/spitting in class.** Drinks (non-alcoholic!) are fine with me, but food and tobacco are not.
3. **Complete reading assignments on time.** If you do not do the reading, you will almost certainly fail this class. Please bring your textbooks to class with you, as we may refer to them frequently.
4. **Pay attention.** Listen attentively, take notes, and keep private conversations to a minimum. If you don’t take notes, you’ll wish you had when exam time comes. And if you’re talking, it should be to me or to the class.
Academic Honesty
I encourage you to discuss the course material or project ideas with other students and to study in groups. On written assignments, exams and homework, however, your work must be entirely your own. Cheating or plagiarizing is grounds for automatic failure for any assignment or for the course as a whole. Any time you use another’s words or ideas, either verbatim or paraphrased, you must give them proper acknowledgment. If you are unsure how to document your sources, please feel free to ask me before turning in an assignment. You may also want to take a look at Columbia University’s web site on using and documenting quotations, including those from online sources (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx_basic.html).

Notes about the ITV (Interactive Television) Classroom
For those of you who have never had a class in an ITV room, there are a few things to keep in mind. In-class examples (like pictures and musical selections) may not transmit very well over the system, and I ask those of you in the remote classroom to be patient and to please let me know if the quality needs improving. For all of us, the most important thing to remember is that there are actual people at the other end of the microphones. They can hear you whispering, rustling papers, or tapping on the desks!

We are breaking in a new ITV system which may fail occasionally. I won’t hesitate to call for help in getting the equipment back on if it should go off, but this will, unfortunately, use up some of our class time. If we lose our connection, rest assured that I’m doing everything I can to get it back. Students at the remote sites, please be patient and wait at least 15 minutes before leaving the classroom. If, after 15 minutes, you still can’t see or hear me, call it a day – but all assignments and readings will still be due on the dates in the class schedule.
HI 203E: Religion and Society in America
CLASS AND READING SCHEDULE
Fall 2003

August 28  Syllabus and Introduction: the Sacred and the Secular

PART I: RELIGION AND GROUP IDENTITY

Puritanism: Does religion bring us together or tear us apart?
September 4  Calvinism and the Puritan Community
Packet: Winthrop, Mather

September 11  From Puritan to American
Packet: Edwards; Book: Scarlet Letter

Judaism: Is religion an important part of who you are?
September 18  The Jewish Family
Packet: Roth, Rich; Film: Believe

September 25  Immigration and the City
Packet: Paley; Book: Bread Givers
Due: Paper 1 (Film Review)
Distribute Take-home Midterm Exam

PART II: RELIGION AND SOCIAL ACTION

Slavery: How can God be both for and against the same thing at the same time?
October 2  Slavery: the Nation’s Sin
Packet: Lincoln, Spirituals
Due: Take-home Midterm Exam

October 9  The Beechers and Abolitionism
Packet: Garrison; Book: Uncle Tom’s Cabin

Civil Rights: Does religious belief obligate us to help improve our society?
October 16  Civil Rights: Christians and Jews
Packet: King, Levy

October 23  Civil Rights: the Nation of Islam
Packet: Malcolm X; Book: The Fire Next Time
PART III: RELIGION AND THE INDIVIDUAL

**Is Religion Bad for Us?**

October 30   Introduction to *Wise Blood*: Catholicism and the South  
Packet: O’Connor, Clarke, Eight Hymns

November 6   “Puritans” and “Philistines”  
Packet: Mencken; Book: *Wise Blood*  
**Due: Paper 2 (Book Review)**

**Is Religion Good for Us?**

November 13   Transcendentalism and the New Age  
Packet: Whitman, James, Hitt

November 20   Buddhism and the Beats  
Packet: Ginsberg; Book: *The Dharma Bums*

November 27   No Class – Thanksgiving

December 4   Movie Day

December 11   Final Presentations  
Distribute Take-home Final Exam  
**Due: Paper 3 (Current Events Research Paper)**

Wednesday, December 17   **Due: Take-Home Final Exam**