Religions in America
REL 100  Fall 2011  MW 2:15-3:35  Shaffer 221D
Inst. Jenny Caplan (jacaplan@syr.edu)
Office Hours: M 12:30-2 and by appointment HL 514

This course is a tour through the major religions of the world as they are lived and practiced in America. It will cover religions of Eastern, Western, and American origin and situate them in the unique setting of the United States. As a nation of immigrants, the religious lives of Americans are more varied and dynamic than those of anyone anywhere else. Though we will use a main textbook, we will also read fiction and non-fiction about various religions being experienced in America and look at the ways literature can enhance our understanding of what it means to be a religious American.

Learning Objectives:
1. Learn the history and beliefs of many of the world’s religions as experienced in America
2. Learn to write critically about literature and synthesize it with historical material
3. Learn to think critically about religion and religious interaction

Required Texts:

World Religions in America by Jacob Neusner
Ceremony by Leslie Marmon Silko
The Accidental Buddhist by Dinty Moore
The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf by Mohja Kahf

**All books are available for purchase in the SU bookstore and are on reserve at the library. Be aware that older editions of Ceremony will have different pagination and will lack the new Introduction by the author I want you to read, and earlier editions of the Neusner book lack MANY of the chapters we are reading, so purchase older editions with caution.

Grade Breakdown:

Attendance/Participation: 20%
Guadeloupe paper: 5%
Midterm: 15%
Novel Responses: 30% (3@ 10% each)
NRM Project: 10%
Final: 20%
Schedule of Classes

**M 8/29**: Introduction  
HW: Read Neusner Ch. 1

**W 8/31**: Indigenous Religions  
HW: Begin Ceremony and read blog on Our Lady of Guadeloupe. Write 1 page on why she may be important in understanding how religions interact: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6662217/ (due 9/7).

**M 9/5**: NO CLASS

**W 9/7**: Indigenous Religions  
HW: Ceremony, “Native American Spirituality” (Blackboard)

**M 9/12**: Indigenous Religion  
**Ceremony paper due!**  
HW: Neusner Ch. 2

**W 9/14**: Protestant Reformation and Colonial Religion  
HW: “Great Awakening”, “Azusa Street” (Blackboard)

**M 9/19**: Protestantism  
HW: Neusner Ch. 4

**W9/21**: Catholicism  
HW: Neusner Ch. 5

**M 9/26**: Hispanic Catholicism  
HW: Neusner Ch. 3

**W 9/28**: The African American Experience  
HW: Neusner ch. 7

**M 10/3**: Judaism  
HW: Neusner ch. 10

**W 10/5**: Hinduism  
HW: Neusner ch. 11

**M 10/10**: Buddhism  
HW: Accidental Buddhist
W 10/12: Buddhism
Accidental Buddhist paper due!

M 10/17: MIDTERM!!
HW: Neusner ch. 6

W 10/19: Orthodox Churches
HW: Neusner ch. 9

M 10/24: Baha'i Faith, First NRM?
HW: Neusner ch. 18

W 10/26: LDS
HW: Neusner ch. 13

M 10/31: Millerites
HW: Neusner ch. 14

W 11/2: Christian Science
HW: "Communities of Dissent" (Blackboard)

M 11/7: Separatists: The Amish, The Shakers, Mennonites, GB, etc
HW: Neusner ch. 17

W 11/9: Neopaganism
HW: Neusner ch. 16

M 11/14: Scientology
HW: Neusner ch. 8

W 11/16: Islam
HW: The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf

M 11/28: Islam
Tangerine Scarf paper due!
HW: "Comprehending Cults" (Blackboard)

W 11/30 Doomsday! Heaven’s Gate, Waco, Jonestown
Form groups

M 12/5 & W 12/7: Presentations

12/15 Final exam! 5:15-7:15pm
Assignment Guidelines

**Novel Responses: Due 9/12, 10/12, 11/28, Length: 3-5 pages**

These are meant to be critical responses to the literature we read based on the course materials. Do NOT summarize the book. I want you to think about the particular tradition highlighted in each book and what it means to practice that tradition in America. Each one is based specifically on the American experience and it is your task to think about why the characters or real life author have these experiences. This is meant to be a synthesis of the historical information and the personal, lived, religions. You may use any course materials, but may not consult outside sources.

**NRM Project: Due 12/5 & 12/7**

In small groups (3-4 people) you will create a religion. You will tell us what the religion is all about, what its sacred texts are, and what it thinks about several important questions (i.e. What happens when we die? Why are we here?). On the day of your presentation you will be expected to turn in a short paper (1-2 pages) telling me two things: 1) What your role in the group was and how you contributed and 2) What you got out of the project and what you think of your created religion. Your grade will come primarily from this paper, so don’t forget about it!

**Final Paper: Due 12/15, Length: 10-12 pages**

Focus: Pick any aspect discussed in the course and formulate a topic for a research paper. Students are encouraged to think about NRM in particular for this topic. Literature is also a rich source of inspiration. I will be happy to meet with you if you have problems thinking of a topic or focusing your idea. At least three sources from outside the course should be consulted.

**Please note: NO grades will be discussed within the first 24 hours of an assignment being returned. If you wish to discuss a grade take a day (or more) to think about my comments and what you wish to say and then come see me.**

**Attendance Policy**

There are no “excused absences” in this course. You may miss up to two classes with no reflection on your grade. These are yours to do with as you wish; use as sick days, go home for a long weekend, take a mental health day before a big project, etc. You don’t need to clear it with me, they are to be used at your discretion. After two absences, however, subsequent
absence will result in a lower participation grade so plan your absence use wisely. Documented medical emergencies will, of course, have allowances made for them.

**Due Dates and Late Work**

Things are due when they are due. If you have extenuating circumstances, talk to me in advance and we will attempt to work something out. Do not, however, ask for an extension at the last minute and expect it to be granted. Late work will be accepted with a reduction in points.

**Class Courtesy**

All students are expected to follow simple rules of academic courtesy with respect to fellow students and instructors. Please come to class on time to avoid disrupting the class. Once class begins, you must refrain from personal conversations. You must put away all non-course reading materials (e.g. newspapers). Turn off and put away all cell phones and MP3 players. Do not text during class. Refrain from using computers for any non-course related activities. Please avoid premature preparations to leave class; I will let you know when class is over. Eating and drinking are allowed, but will be banned if food or drink become distractions or problems. You may be asked to leave the class for the day if you do not follow these rules.

**Statement Regarding Disability-Related Accommodations**

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services, see [http://disabilityservices.syr.edu](http://disabilityservices.syr.edu)

**Academic Integrity Statement**

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see [http://academicintegrity.syr.edu](http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/)